

# Figurations of the Grotesque in Menippean Satire

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*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

The lower the order of mental activity the  
better the company. Up to a point.

— BECKETT, *Company*, p.12

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# 1

## Menippean Satire and the Grotesque

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### 1. A Brief Genealogy of Menippean Satire

Ignoring for the moment the fact that the very existence of the genre is a contentious issue, menippean satire is a form of writing with a history which extends back almost two and a half thousand years, at least to its legendary origin with Menippus of Gadara in the first half of the third century B.C. Menippus' writings no longer survive, but some facts of his life are known, largely through the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius. Menippus was a slave who became a pupil of the Cynic Metrocles, purchased his freedom and settled in Thebes where he satirized all formal schools of philosophy and all philosophical elites. Legend has it that he hanged himself, through disappointment at financial ruin.<sup>1</sup> Not entirely inappropriately, then, 'menippean satire' has the attraction of having its 'origin' as mythic — Donald Dudley has noted that Menippus, "like the Cheshire cat, has faded away to a grin"<sup>2</sup> — an apt condition for a form characterised by unparalleled freedom and invention. (This lack of a defining origin also has important epistemological implications, allowing Menippean satire to inhabit the undecidable boundary region of literature and philosophy on the one hand, and of literature and "writing" on the other.) From what is known through fragments of, and references to Menippus, his satire was a *mélange* of prose and poetry, presumably developed from verse satire with additional prose interludes.<sup>3</sup> It was characterised by bombastic and often coarse attacks on the

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1 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Vol II pp. 54-78.

2 Dudley, Donald R. *A History of Cynicism*. London: Methuen, 1937, p. 69

3 Comprehensive discussions of the relation of menippean satire to the prosimetrum and the *spoudogeloion* have been undertaken in Coffey, Holland, Kirk, Relihan, Highet. Highet writes of menippean satire:

Menippus was a Syrian from Gadara. *The Arabian Nights* constantly slip into rhyming prose and thence into verse: see Burton's 'Terminal Essay,' c. 5, in his translation. Professor Moses Hadas, to whom I owe the

*philosophus gloriosus*, or learned crank. The early popularity of the menippea appears to have had as much to do with its versatility as its Cynic relentlessness.

If nothing else, 'menippean satire' is an appropriate term to refer to the works of those authors who considered their works to be 'after Menippus'. Among the classical writers, Varro (whose menippea are largely lost), Petronius (*Satyricon*), Seneca (*Apocolocyntosis*), Julian the Apostate (*The Caesars* and *Mispogon*) and Lucian of Samosata are the most famous exponents.<sup>4</sup> In the middle ages, an awareness of the continuity of the form is evident in a work like Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*,<sup>5</sup> the didascallic nature of which indicates the use to which the menippea had been put in the so-called "Dark Ages" by scholars such as Macrobius (*Saturnalia*), Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae*), Martianus Capella (*The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*), Fulgentius (*The Three Books of Mythologies*), Vergilius (*The Cosmography*) and others too numerous to mention.<sup>6</sup> All were set on imitating the positive use made of the menippea by Varro as a means to publicise philosophy and promote learning in a time when genuine learning was in decline.

The reintroduction into Europe from Byzantine sources of Lucian's works in the fifteenth century spurred the production of several menippea, particularly from humanists such as Erasmus (*Praise of Folly*), More (*Utopia*), the great French menippea, *La Satyre Menippée*, and the Marprelate controversies which unfolded

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suggestion that the shape of Menippean satire was semitic in origin, explains that there is an Arabic form of humorous philosophical discussion in prose mingled with verse, called the *maqama* or 'session'. See his *Ancilla to Classical Reading* (New York, 1954) 58; but also O. Immisch, *NJbb* 47 (1921) 409-421. [Highet, Gilbert. *The Anatomy of Satire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 251n].

Kirk, however, notes that "contrary to the citation in Gilbert Highet's *The Anatomy of Satire* ... there is no mention [in the 'Terminal Essay'] (vol.10, pp. 220-58) of prose-verse alternation in Arabic *magamat*." and considers this and other claims of Highet's to be dubious. Kirk, Eugene P, *Menippean Satire: An Annotated Catalogue of Texts and Criticism*, New York: Garland, 1980, p. 231; p. 251

- 4 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. xv. The term 'menippea' is Bakhtin's preferred term for menippean satire. This thesis alternates freely between referring to the 'menippea' and to 'menippean satire' in order to indicate that menippean satire does not necessarily always satirise in the sense of an attack on a clearly defined object or idea.
- 5 Bakhtin, Relihan, Kirk, Holland, Highet and Frye all agree that *The Consolation of Philosophy* is a menippean satire, although Juanita Sullivan Williams disagrees: "the idea of a lady named Philosophy spouting Fate and Providence is so anti-Menippean that the later Voltaire would make it into one of his objects of attack." Williams, Juanita Sullivan, *Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire*, Vanderbilt University, Ph.D. diss., 1966, pp. 5-6
- 6 See Chapter Seven for a fuller discussion of didascallic menippean satire and the implication of the menippea in philosophy.

between 1588 and 1590.<sup>7</sup> It is not possible to adequately assess the significance of menippean satire in English without recourse to translations of those menippea which have had great influence.

Just as it has seemed naive to assume that menippean satire began with Menippus, however — Bakhtin contends that the form arose considerably earlier, citing Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates, Heraclides Ponticus and Bion Borysthenes as examples<sup>8</sup>— so has it seemed wrong to restrict the term ‘menippean satire’ to a few classical texts and to the works of a relatively obscure dynasty of comic illuminati which were self-consciously ‘after Menippus’<sup>9</sup>. That John Dunton wrote of his “satiric pedigree” in his *Voyage Round the World*,<sup>10</sup> does not make his work any more or less ‘menippean’ than that of (say) Thomas Pynchon, who makes no reference to Menippus or menippean satire. Yet Pynchon’s familiarity with such menippean avatars as Swift, Sterne, Rabelais, Voltaire, Peacock or Joyce (to name but a few) is obvious enough to have prompted a full length study of his work as menippean satire.<sup>11</sup> Of the menippea that have been produced in modern (post-

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7 *La Satyre Menippée* is known in English as *A Pleasaunt Satyre or Poesie, A Satyre Menippized* (London: Ortwin, 1595) and also *Englande’s Bright Honour: Shining through the dark Disgrace of Spaines Catholicon* (London: Ortwin, 1602). and was likely to have inspired Donne’s menippean satire, *Ignatius His Conclave*. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*, p. 192. See Chapter Seven for a fuller discussion of the importance of menippean satire for humanism. For a discussion of the menippean nature of the various Marprelate controversies see Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, pp. 162-66. Menippean satire influenced the form of both sides of the debate as well as the quarrel between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey. Joseph Salem has indicated the influence of Poggio Bracciolini’s *Facetiae* on Gabriel Harvey. See Salem, Joseph S. “A Reference to the *Facetiae* of Poggio Bracciolini in Gabriel Harvey’s *An Advertisement for Pap-Hatchett, and Martin Mar-Prelate*”, *Notes and Queries*, June 1984 31 (229): 2, 180–1. Blanchard notes the influence of Agrippa’s *De Vanitate* throughout Nashe’s career. See Blanchard, W. Scott, *Scholar’s Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995, p. 112.

8 Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 113. See also Holland, Philip Hoyt, “Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English”, University College, London, Ph.D. Diss., 1975, pp. 44-51 for an extended discussion of Bion.

9 For classical scholars, there is considerable debate over the status of some works that seem fairly obviously to be menippean satires such as Petronius’ *Satyricon*. For example, recently discovered papyrus fragments of Greek prosimetric fiction have led some scholars to declare menippean satire irrelevant to any discussion of the *Satyricon*. See Relihan, Joel C., *Ancient Menippean Satire*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 91.

10 Sherbert, Garry Herald. *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit: Ideologies of Self-Consciousness in Dunton, D’Urfey and Sterne*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 62

11 See Kharpertian, Theodore D, *Hand to Turn the Time — Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*, Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990

Renaissance) times, some have the kind of formal and/or generic self-consciousness evident in Burton or Swift or Peacock and some the literary 'naivety' of Lewis Carroll or Joseph Furphy.

Moreover, as the example of Pynchon suggests, menippean satire is a genre which has yet to exhaust itself, having continued to be a conduit of innovative and experimental writing across a wide variety of themes and forms in the twentieth century. Its protean form and techniques make it perfectly adaptable, from period to period with their manifold ideological concerns, to assume a wide variety of literary roles, not all of them restricted to ideological attack or fiction.

## 2. Critical Commentary on 'Menippean Satire'

In spite of its rambunctiousness and comic excess, however, the critical fortunes of menippean satire have been less than happy. In antiquity it was generally regarded as an oddity, with Cicero remarking of Varro's menippeans:

You have brought much light to our poets and to Latin literature and language as well, and have yourself made a multiform and elegant poetic work in nearly every meter, and have in many places embarked upon philosophical topics, sufficient for inspiring your readers, but insufficient for their instruction.<sup>12</sup>

It is probably safe to say that in antiquity it was recognised as distinct from other genres, but it may not have been recognised as a distinct genre in its own right. Quintilian speaks of "an even older type of satire [to that of Lucilius] which derives its variety not merely from verse, but from an admixture of prose as well. Such were the satires composed by Terentius Varro, the most learned of all Romans."<sup>13</sup> Throughout the middle ages, menippean satires were produced, although it was Justus Lipsius' *Satyra Menippea* (1581) that marked the first instance of the use of menippean satire as a generic term.<sup>14</sup> It was grudgingly acknowledged by Renaissance scholars such as Isaac Casaubon and J.C. Scaliger<sup>15</sup> and later Dryden.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Cited in Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 51

13 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. 270, quoting Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.

14 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 12

15 Kirk notes that humanists such as Scaliger and Casaubon gave menippean satire grudging mention: "Scaliger called Lucian 'the Cerberus of the Muses,' and Casaubon, even though he was writing an extensive treatise on the forms of ancient satire, regarded Varro's *Menippeae* as a structural 'monstrosity' and 'depravity', and called Menippus 'ignorant of the literary kinds.' Even

From the eighteenth century until relatively recently the literature concerning the genre has been scant, prompting some scholars to proclaim that it had died out in the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Since the proselytizing work of both Frye and Bakhtin in the second half of this century (Bakhtin's work only being freely available to the west since 1968), there has been a revival of interest in the genre, although the quality of work produced on the subject has varied widely. From 1980 to 1996 there have been eight books and over thirty articles produced specifically on the subject, apart from the incidental references and passing mentions which are far too numerous to relate.

By far the largest volume of this criticism relates to classical literature, and literature up to the early renaissance that clearly has a direct relation to classical literature. Much of this criticism deals with menippean satire as a genre after Menippus. It is therefore unquestioningly concerned with ideas of literary influence, intention and "generic integrity."<sup>18</sup> The discernible influence of menippean satirists such as Lucian, Seneca, Petronius and Varro in antiquity as well as from the middle ages onwards means that a paradigmatic definition of the menippea as a form of prose and verse medley is possible. Indeed, if one was to agree with those classical scholars that menippean satire 'died out', then works in the genre would be easily definable, either through their allusion to other Menippeans or in their obvious indebtedness to previous Menippeans. The difficulty with this is, again, a consideration of 'genre'.

To read a classicist discussing menippean satire is not very dissimilar from a classicist discussing the ode, or the epic or any other genre which is definable by similar examples. This is because the menippea of antiquity, with few exceptions, are all fairly similar, and are also similar to many menippea of the middle ages and the renaissance (many of which are in imitation of the classics). However, once the continuity of the genre has been established, the narrow definition of the classical scholar is no longer adequate. The medley that characterises the form of the menippea

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the ancient authorities Cicero, Probus, and Quintilian seem to shudder when bringing up Menippean satire; they condescend to speak of it at all only out of apparent amazement that Varro, 'vir Romanorum eruditissimus,' chose to express himself in such a repugnant form." *Menippean Satire*, p. xxxii

16 In "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" Dryden follows Casaubon's ideas of satire and refers to menippean satire as Varronian satire. Dryden, John, *Essays of John Dryden*, Ed W. P. Ker, New York: Russell and Russell, 1961, Vol. 2, pp. 44-67. The alternative term 'Varronian satire' is really only relevant to those Latin works which follow after Varro and the limited scope of such a term immediately precludes it from consideration.

17 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. ix

18 For a survey of such literature, see Kirk's checklist of "Criticism of Menippean Satire" pp. 223-284 in his *Bibliography*.

need not be merely alternating sections of poetry and prose. The menippea can be characterised by the conflation of different styles (usually parodic, as in *Ulysses*), different languages or discourses (as in *The Waste Land*), or different typographic forms (such as the comic profusion of footnotes in *The Third Policeman*, or in Derrida's *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*.<sup>19</sup>). Kirk's admirable *Bibliography*, which terminates in 1660, does not pretend to deal with the menippea as a genre that continues to the present day. The tenor of his arguments for the form and against other critics is largely determined by the time-frame within which the *Bibliography* is compiled, with the majority of works cited Lucianic in tone or indebtedness. Most modern discussions of the menippea have used the classical scholar's definitions and arguments as a starting point, and their conclusions are largely coloured by this.

One notable exception to this tendency is Northrop Frye. His championing of the menippea initially did more than any other critic in the West to draw attention to it, although he conflates the menippea with the anatomy. To a large extent, Frye is guilty of forcing a square peg into a round hole: his theory of genres requires a neat, quadripartite arrangement that forces him to replace the "cumbersome and in modern times rather misleading 'Menippean satire'" with the term 'anatomy'.<sup>20</sup> His argument proceeds rather loosely from the observation that the main feature of the menippea is an intellectual exuberance which finds its expression in the encyclopaedic farrago.<sup>21</sup> This tendency, evident on a surface level in the menippea in the form of lists and catalogues, finds its apogee, for Frye, in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Therefore, dissection and analysis become the principal features of the renamed and refashioned menippea. The result of this reorientation of emphasis is that the traditionally grotesque aspects of the menippea, such as its coarseness, invective and flights of fancy, are subordinated to its intellectual concerns. The rambunctious energy that characterises many menippea is transmuted by Frye into an intellectual vivacity.

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19 Derrida, Jacques, *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, Trans. John P. Leavey Jr, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980; O'Brien, Flann [Brian O'Nolan], *The Third Policeman*, London: Harper Collins, 1993. Both works can be described as having footnotes which have "gone feral", on occasions extending over three or more pages or, as in the case of Derrida, eventually taking over the text.

20 Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. pp. 306-11

21 See also Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, for a discussion of the exuberance of wit as a defining feature of menippean satire.

Eugene Kirk has argued that Frye's term 'anatomy' is, on the contrary, more misleading than 'menippean satire.' In his essay "Genre and Satiric Strategy in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*", Kirk rightly notes that, when used in the period 1575-1650, the term 'anatomy' was a "rubric for poems, treatises, Euphuistic novels, geographies, pamphlets, prose polemics, devotional works — in short, for such a variety of forms as to render hopeless any idea that 'anatomy' ever implied a specific genre."<sup>22</sup> Kirk is not alone in expressing these sentiments. Among others, Barbara Merry has complained that Frye's 'anatomy' is a "vague definition of the genre" which "resolve[s] little of the difficulty in specifying the essential nature of Menippean satire."<sup>23</sup> Kirk's argument has its most telling thrust when he strives to emphasise that the *Anatomy of Melancholy* is really a satire on the *theologus gloriosus*, in this case, the Jesuits. It is evident that Kirk feels that the identification of a work as a menippea depends upon the existence of an object of satire, conforming to the notion of the crazed academician, philosopher or theologian. The weakness with this paradigm, that menippean satire must *satirise*, is evident if one examines closely the list of menippea that Kirk includes in his *Bibliography*. Although the *Bibliography* only goes up to 1660, there are several notable omissions in a work which claims to be as complete as exhaustive searches and incomplete records allow.

Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1593) is a case in point. The form is rather a medley, with some verse interludes and inserted genres which are of a satiric nature. The first person narration of Jack Wilton is typical of many menippea: he is vain, ostentatious and, as his narrative shows, sexually humiliated, as well. These features are common to characters in menippea as diverse as *Midnight's Children*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Eccius Dedolatus*, *Ulysses*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Satyricon*, *Myra Breckenridge* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The *philosophus gloriosus* is satirised in the character of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey and the *theologus gloriosus* in the form of the anabaptist uprising. The diction is unconventional to say the least, with phrases such as "finnigraphical cuffs" and "firking flantado amphibologies" appearing along with many other neologisms.<sup>24</sup> There is much coarseness (with the the theme of

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22 Korkowski, Bud [Eugene Kirk]. "Genre and Satiric Strategy in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*". *Genre*, 1975 8:1 74–87, p 76.

23 Merry, Barbara Lynn. *Menippean Elements in Paul Scarron's "Roman Comique"*. Geneva: Peter Lang Verlag, 1992, p. 15

24 It is worthwhile noting that Nashe is second only to Shakespeare as the writer credited with the most originary usages of words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

obscenity underlined by the appearance of Aretino as a character)<sup>25</sup> and much grotesque imagery. Unless an oversight, Kirk seems to have considered the work to be an Elizabethan novel, and hence not a 'satire', although it has been argued elsewhere that the "thematic and stylistic elements of the work are illuminated by Bakhtin's ideas of carnivalesque patterns in menippean satire."<sup>26</sup>

A similar case in point concerns the critical fortunes of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Kirk lists critics, particularly those from the Renaissance, who regarded *Don Quixote* as a Menippean satire.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Kirk does not specifically list *Don Quixote* as a menippean satire in his Bibliography, he notes elsewhere that

since we now consider *Don Quixote* a picaresque novel, we would do well to note that the important critic Rapin designated the book a Menippean satire a century before Sterne, and Rapin's remark came already translated to Sterne in the preface to the second volume of Dunton's *Voyage Round the World*; Dunton regarded *Don Quixote* as a generic relative of Quevedo's Lucianic satires.<sup>28</sup>

Another significant omission is Sir Thomas Urquhart's *The Jewel* (1653). Urquhart's work features a self-consciously puffed up first person narration (it is difficult to tell whether the narrative voice is mad, or merely prone to extreme exaggeration), consistent with menippean personae such as Martinus Scriblerus and Ricardus Aristarchus of *The Dunciad* or the bizarre H. Hatterr of *All About H. Hatterr*.<sup>29</sup> Neologisms and macaronics abound to the extent that the text is unintelligible without extensive interpolation and footnotes. There are satiric targets (most notably the Presbyterian party of Civil War Scotland); there is carnival imagery in the story of the Admirable Crichton and there are flights of intellectual fancy only rivalled by Swift or Flann O'Brien. It must be noted that there is no consistent satiric focus, which seems to be the gauge by which Kirk measures the 'menippeanness' of a work. In terms of

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25 Aretino would have been familiar to Nashe either in an edition of his *Ragionamenti* published by John Wolfe in London in 1584 or 1585, or in the more well known "Postures of Aretino", pornographic engravings accompanied by some of his *Sonneti Lussuriosi* and poetry by other hands. See Kearney, Patrick J., *A History of Erotic Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1982, pp. 24-26.

26 Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Inside the Outside: Nashe's Unfortunate Traveller and Bakhtin's Polyphonic Novel." *English Literary History*, 1983 50:1 61-81.

27 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, pp. 132, 268, 271, 226-27.

28 Korkowski, Bud [Eugene Kirk]. "Tristram Shandy, Digression, and the Menippean Tradition," *Scholia Satyrice*, 1975 1:4 3-15, p. 15. In his note to the above, Kirk also comments that the pretended loss of Cidi Hamete Benengeli's manuscript is much in the Menippean manner.

29 Desani, G.V. *All About H. Hatterr*. New York: McPherson and Co., 1986.

the serio-comic tone, heterogeneous form, unusual diction and fantastic actions, these two works are so unmistakably works of menippea that I would suggest they cannot adequately be understood without reference to this generic context. But it is also clear that they do not fit the pattern of being clearly “satiric”. In other words, the ‘satire’ of menippean satire has more to do with form, as in the *satira* of classical literature, than in an understanding of satire as a normative ridiculing or lampooning of vice or folly. This is, of course, not to say that satiric attacks on the *philosophus gloriosus* or *theologus gloriosus* are not important features of the menippea. It is simply that there are a large number of works where it is difficult to locate such attacks and yet they are quite clearly, by a number of other criteria, menippea. ‘Satirising’ does not exhaust the potential meaning of the menippea, but it is a useful notion to retain.

The last major theorist of the menippea to be considered, Mikhail Bakhtin, presents a more complex picture. Many of his assertions are in agreement with Frye, such that the extensive treatment which Bakhtin accords the menippea in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* seems merely to be a dilation on Frye's comments in his *Anatomy of Criticism*.<sup>30</sup> Where Bakhtin differs radically from other treatments of the menippea is in his idea of carnival. Both the Dostoevsky book and *Rabelais and His World* deal extensively with the notion of the menippea as a “carnivalised” form. That is, the menippea is “influenced — directly and without mediation, or indirectly, through a series of intermediate links — by one or another variant of carnivalistic folklore (ancient or medieval).”<sup>31</sup>

This opens up vast possibilities for the consideration of, for example, the relationship between carnivalesque imagery and carnivalesque structure, as has been done by Ivanov.<sup>32</sup> Work on the notion of carnival has been extraordinarily popular, no doubt because of the elusive prospect of emancipation it offers. Many critics, such as Terry Eagleton, have tended to emphasise a Marxist dimension: hence books such as *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, which focuses upon the influence of carnival on literature as one of subversion and alterity.

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30 Cf. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 309-11 and Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pp. 114-19

31 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 107

32 Ivanov, “The Semiotic Theory of Carnival as the Inversion of Bipolar Opposites” in Eco, Umberto; Ivanov, V. V.; and Rector, Monica, *Carnival!*, Ed Thomas A. Sebeok, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1984, pp. 11-36

Continental thinkers have largely followed a semiotic line in considering carnival, such as Kristeva, Eco and Todorov; or a formalist line, indicated by Ivanov.

Many thinkers characterise the carnivalesque as subversive, and assume that works which are carnivalesque, reflecting carnival in their imagery and structure, are also menippean. An example of this is Suzanne Ferriss' article "Romantic Carnavalesque: Byron's *The Tale of Calil, Beppo, and Don Juan*,"<sup>33</sup> which claims *Don Juan* as a menippean satire because of its "deliberate multifariousness" of tone, its "jolly relativity" and its lack of a "one-sided critique." Her claim that "the plasticity of the Menippean mode allows Byron to mix an incredible variety of forms within the borders of his poem" does not wholly make sense when the virtuosity of Byron's use of *ottava rima* is measured against the formal *pot pourri* of a work such as *The Waste Land* or *The Complete Works of Billy the Kid* or *Moravagine* or the novels of Cabrera Infante.<sup>34</sup> It is characteristic of many critics that 'carnavalesque' is synonymous with 'menippean' without them realising that carnivalesque elements, such as the harlequin engineer of *Heart of Darkness* or the grotesquerie of *Brighton Rock*, do not necessarily indicate that the text in question is a menippean satire.

Different interpretations of carnival proceed, of course, from a particular ideological axe-grinding. In the case of the semioticians, the semiotic, inverted relation of carnival to the "every-day" world is stressed: as a result, carnival is seen in a subsidiary if not subservient role to power. Marxist interpretations tend to stress the subversive nature of carnival. Each particular interpretation of carnival in turn reflects the significance that is attached to the menippea. For example, Eco takes a dim view of the menippea, equating it with comedy. In turn, his attitude to comedy, as is discussed in the following chapter, withholds from it the possibility of structural transgression and, hence, liberation.

One problem with Bakhtin's discussion of carnival is a tendency to see carnivalesque works as being more "carnivalised" the closer they are temporally to the hey-day of carnival, the middle ages to late Renaissance. Bakhtin has noted that since the

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33 Ferriss, Suzanne. "Romantic Carnavalesque: Byron's *The Tale of Calil, Beppo and Don Juan*". In Levine, Alice and Keane, Robert N. [eds]. *Rereading Byron*. New York: Garland, 1993, pp. 133-149.

34 For a discussion of the menippean nature of Cabrera Infante novels such as Infante, G. Cabrera, *Infante's Inferno*, Trans. Suzanne Jill Levine et al. London: Faber and Faber, 1985 and *Three Trapped Tigers*, Trans. Donald Gardner et al. London: Picador, 1980, see Nelson, Ardis L., *Cabrera Infante in the Menippean Tradition*, Newark: Juan de la Cuesta Hispanic Monographs, 1983.

enlightenment the great folk-carnivalistic trunk has split into many branches,<sup>35</sup> implying that those carnivalesque works which come after this 'dissociation of risibility' lack the potential to be 'great.' As a result, Rabelais is accorded the highest accolades. It is largely Rabelais' placement in history, and his proximity to folk-carnivalistic traditions, which situates him at such an apogee of achievement in Bakhtin's eyes.<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin is a nostalgic, yearning for a particular version of the middle ages in which "medieval laughter is not a subjective, individual and biological consciousness of the uninterrupted flow of time. It is the social consciousness of all the people."<sup>37</sup> The identification of Rabelais with this high-water mark of carnival makes it difficult for carnival and carnivalization to be conceived in terms wholly distinct from the massive presence of Rabelais in the comic tradition.

### 3. 'Menippean Satire' as a Genre

From this or any survey of the critical literature on 'menippean satire', the two questions most frequently and persistently invoked are, firstly, on what basis can an identification of the menippean be made and, secondly, once the identification has been made, how can one speak of 'menippean satire' as a genre? How can one make generic links between works which are similar only in their dissimilarity? The particular combination of the sentimental, the digressive and the fancifully comic in *Tristram Shandy* does not readily admit of a contiguous relationship with *Ulysses* or Michael Ondaatje's *The Complete Works of Billy The Kid*. Instead, we tend to think of works such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Ulysses* as unique: if we are pressed, then a genealogy including Swift, Voltaire, Rabelais and perhaps Burton can be cited. The perceived uniqueness of particular menippean satires has until now prevented widespread study of the genre and of various menippea in the context of their genre.

If there is one menippean satire which can be said to be analogous in form to another, then such an analogy cannot be carried beyond the confines of a fortuitous

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35 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 131. Bakhtin also refers to the "disintegration of popular laughter" in Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 120.

36 This is evident not only from reading Bakhtin but by studying how he is perceived. For example, Kharpertian's book on Pynchon makes it quite clear that he wishes to do for Pynchon what Bakhtin did for Rabelais. That is, placing him at a transitional stage from one epoch to another (for Bakhtin, the medieval to the modern, for Pynchon, the modern to the post-modern) and crediting him with a new artistic discourse or sensibility that makes him a pinnacle of his age, as Rabelais was.

37 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 92

comparison. As Frye observes, Huxley's novels bear some similarities to the prose satires of Peacock; but neither is similar to Julian the Apostate's *The Caesars* or Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. There is no menippean satire which is quintessentially menippean: there is no paradigmatic menippea and there is no such thing as a 'pure' menippean satire.<sup>38</sup> A form which is based on disjunction and impurity can have no final, refined form.

In fact, Frye and Bakhtin speak of the menippea as an essentially grotesque form, particularly in its tendency to combine with other forms. However, neither critic can resist trying (as Master Alcofribas may have succeeded in doing) to abstract the quintessence of the menippea. "The *Satyricon* of Petronius," writes Bakhtin at one point, "is nothing other than a Menippean satire extended to the limits of a novel" while "the *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass)* of Apuleius... is a full-blown Menippean satire."<sup>39</sup> Frye writes at one point that "the Alice books are perfect Menippean satires, and so is *The Water Babies*, which has been influenced by Rabelais"<sup>40</sup> while at another point he notes that "there is a strong admixture of romance in Rabelais."<sup>41</sup>

Even while recognising the protean nature of the menippea, neither critic resists attempts to define categorically by example through recourse to a paradigmatic concept. In Bakhtin's case it is the notion of carnivalization; in Frye's it is the subordination of menippean satire to the 'super genre' of the anatomy. Even Kirk is not immune to this tendency: his yardstick for identifying the menippea is as a 'satire' of either a *philosophus gloriosus* or a *theologus gloriosus*.

One of the more engaging studies of menippean satire in recent years is Garry Sherbert's study of Dunton, D'Urfey and Sterne. For Sherbert, menippean satire is, at least in the period under direct consideration, characterised by "learned wit."<sup>42</sup> He also characterises menippean satire by the rhetorical trope of catachresis. The difficulty with this, apart from any definitive 'definition' that may be offered for a genre which gleefully resists such systematic identification, is that notions of strained

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38 Miller has perversely argued that Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno* books are menippean archetypes. Miller, Edmund, "It Thought it Were a Mouse-Trap: The Sylvie and Bruno Books as Archetypal Menippean Satire", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 21:1 111-126.

39 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 113.

40 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 310.

41 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 309.

42 Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, passim

use or misuse must necessarily be contextual. As a master trope for the menippea it is problematic. The fantastic or unusual diction that characterises the menippea is certainly catachretical from the point of view of the 'meanings' which are punctured or transgressed. However, these usages are transformative of meaning, along the lines discussed in relation to grotesque transformation in Chapter two.

Sherbert also speaks of laughter and the unconscious and in particular of the menippean satirist's "literary unconscious" uncovered by the laughter of non-knowledge.<sup>43</sup> This has resonances with certain theorisations of laughter, particularly that of *Witz* as a form of sudden illumination. For instance, Sherbert has made note of Weber's analysis of the "uncanny" similarities between wit and theoretical speculation in *The Legend of Freud*.<sup>44</sup> One of the most difficult aspects of menippean satire is that the 'meaning' of a joke can never be fixed, even if one wishes to locate that fixity in the cathexis of laughter. This does occur, but there is a transformative aspect to the 'joke' that lies outside such notions of the mature intellect finding a mere 'jest of meaning' in the joke: it actually offers up new horizons in which meaning is presently mutable and, as a consequence, liberating.

Most critics of the menippea are constrained, in their formulations of the genre, by the conventions of academic discourse in their attempts to adequately come to grips with the genre. Almost without exception, they recognise that the menippean resistance to systematization is crucial to any understanding of the genre. Barbara Merry proposes a definition of menippean satire "based on 'rupture' which may be viewed as the genre's organizing principle" while Julia Kristeva does so in terms of "excess."<sup>45</sup> However, the exigencies of coherent 'arguments' or 'theses' mean that they rarely have any adequation with the task at hand. The result is more often than not informative, but the 'spirit' of the menippea can only ever be glimpsed behind such analyses. It is the same with this thesis, although it is hoped that the focus on the body and on the grotesque, with all the vagaries that these entail, has as a characteristic an openness which is in keeping with the excess of the menippea. In other words, following Frye, the anatomy of analysis must always remain incomplete.

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43 Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, pp. 85-86

44 Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, p. 82

45 Merry, *Menippean Elements in Paul Scarron's Roman Comique*, p. 2; Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, London: Basil Blackwell, 1981, pp. 79-89

Other scholars of menippean satire, although they do not deviate significantly from the positions elaborated by the principle menippean theorists, represent a relatively heterogeneous array of views. For example, F. Anne Payne has written of “menippean tragedy”, of which *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are examples, and of which Payne says “in these works the human inability to find any kind of validated method of handling the facets of the problem posed is felt as a destructive incapacity that looms larger than the joy promised by the freedom to investigate alternate possibilities.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Sherbert states that Payne’s reliance on Bakhtin has led to a fundamental confusion in identifying the *Canterbury Tales* as a menippean satire and that her idea of menippean tragedy “stretches the genre beyond all recognition.”<sup>47</sup> Adjudication between two critics in such an instance is difficult when it involves recourse to a paradigmatic concept of the genre. It is all the more difficult when the paranoid suggestion emerges from among the minutiae of arguments involved that such a scholarly dispute is grist to the mill for a devious menippean, toiling away in anarchic glee somewhere else in the world.

Juanita Sullivan Williams is one of those critics who stresses the importance of what menippean satire, morally, can teach us. She writes that “menippean satire has a particular ideology which transcends satire of a more personal and specific nature; it possesses at times a tone of tragedy, which lends it an expansive, universal significance.”<sup>48</sup> — which perhaps amounts to nothing more than saying that when menippean satire is not serious it really is, and that when it is sad it is truly great. Theodore Kharpertian, a disciple of Robert C. Elliott, identifies what he sees to be “the genre’s four essential formal and functional conventions: attack, variety, fertility, and delight,”<sup>49</sup> a theme not unrelated to the argument that as a grotesque form, the menippean satire often functions as a means of discovery.

Lastly, the intertextuality of the menippea (a form particularly prevalent in its postmodern incarnation) has been seen as a defining feature by Riikonen:

We can even call the Menippean satire a ‘supergenre’, whose individual works freely connect and mingle prose and verse as well as characteristics

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46 Payne, F. Anne. *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, p. 12

47 Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, p. 9

48 Williams, “Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire”, p. 273

49 Kharpertian, *A Hand to Turn the Time*, p. 86

of other genres. As early as in Greek and Roman Antiquity the Menippean satire showed a high degree of intertextuality and since then it is the genre where the possibilities of intertextual play have been most courageously employed.<sup>50</sup>

All of these views deserve serious consideration, but none convinces as an account which exhausts the genre. Paradigmatic definitions of menippean satire are useful when grounded in a specific historical horizon, but are exposed as inadequate when they pretend toward an authoritative account of the genre.

Kirk's empirical definition of the menippea is probably the best and certainly the safest available:

The chief mark of Menippean style was unconventional diction. Neologisms, portmanteau words, macaronics, preciousness, coarse vulgarity, catalogues, bombast, mixed languages, and protracted sentences were typical of the genre, sometimes appearing all together in the same work. In outward structure, Menippean satire was a medley — usually a medley of alternating prose and verse... Menippean topical elements included outlandish fictions (i.e. fantastic voyages, dreams, visions, talking beasts) and extreme distortions of argument (often, "paradoxes"). In theme, Menippean Satire was essentially concerned with right learning or right belief. That theme often called for ridicule or caricature of some sham-intellectual or theological fraud. Yet sometimes the theme demanded exhortation to learning, when books and studies had fallen into disuse and neglect.

The Menippean writer assumes an audience less learned, less intellectually committed, than himself; but he believes his audience is curious, sincere, sensible, and humour-loving enough to see his point, when that point is presented in an entertaining and knowledgeable way. The genre is nearly always written "downward" to this audience, though "down" is usually not very far "down", to judge by the allusions the Menippean author expects his readers to detect.<sup>51</sup>

Because not all of the above characteristics will be present in a menippean satire at any given time, Kirk promotes Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblances", in which

phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, — but... they are related to one another in many different

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50 Riikonen, Hannu. *Menippean Satire as a Literary Genre, with Special Reference to Seneca's Apocolocyntosis*. Helsinki: Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1987, p. 51

51 Kirk, *Menippean Satire: An Annotated Catalogue*, p. xi.

ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all 'language.'<sup>52</sup>

If we were to substitute 'genre' for 'language', then we could envisage a genre as a thread in which

the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres... Something runs through the whole thread — namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Menippean satire is an heuristic term which does not necessarily relate to a precise form. If there is any *essential* feature of the menippea, then it is its disjunctive nature. On a formal level, it is a medley or an admixture of genres and it is often concerned with the absurd, the irrational and the contradictory.

Without any anchoring concepts, the menippea would frustratingly elude classification and analysis. Without paradigms, the menippea ceases to be a genre (as is the case, perhaps, with any genre) but instead becomes an anti-genre: something we call a genre on the basis of the fact that those works which constitute the genre have both a disjunctive nature and a disjunctive relationship to each other. It also becomes an anti-genre in the sense that it acts as a *pharmakon*, or corrective, satirising drug and also a contaminating poison within literature as a whole.<sup>54</sup> The menippea as *pharmakon* could well serve as a definition of the genre, for it is a remedy to systematizations and hierarchisations of literature and it is always a supplementary remedy to notions of the completeness of the 'Institution of Literature.' It is also a contaminating agent, subverting reason, replacing ends with means, precariously

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52 Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd. edn. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1963, p. 31e

53 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 32e

54 *Pharmakon* means both drug or remedy and poison. Derrida writes on the notion of the *pharmakon* of writing in Derrida, Jacques, *Dissemination*, Trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981, pp. 65ff. It is also possible to see such an interpretation of the term as a topos present in a work such as *2 Henry IV*. When Mowbray and his fellow rebels are offered peace terms by Prince John, the supposed good news, or remedy to their situation is ambivalent: "You wish me health in very happy season,/ For I am on the sudden something ill." (IV ii ll. 79-80) and Henry IV complains, after being told of the defeat of Northumberland, "And wherefore should these good news make me sick?/[Fortune] either gives a stomach and no food —/ Such are the poor, in health — or else a feast/ And takes away the stomach — such are the rich/ That have abundance and enjoy it not" (IV iv ll. 102-108).

inhabiting the boundary that stands against literature and the calling of that boundary, and itself, into question.

Without a discriminating understanding of the genre and without notions of 'pure' and 'impure', the menippea becomes omnipresent: it is not only important in the development of the novelistic discourse, as Bakhtin has it, but it infects the novel itself. Bakhtin actually only ever refers to *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as a novel in his book on Rabelais whereas in his Dostoevsky book he explicitly refers to it as a menippea. Considered in its extremity the Bakhtinian novel is a variant of menippean satire. The danger here for the student of menippean satire is, as Howes has remarked, the absorption of menippean satire into the study of the novel:

when the institutions and ideological matrices of a society begin to collapse, Menippean satire comes to the fore. For this reason, it is inescapably a degenerate or abortive genre: its heterogeneity is not joyful so much as mimetic of the throes of a society in the process of dissipation. Menippean satire thus has an impact only because the centralizing powers of the monologic genres are moribund, and with the advent of capitalism, and a return to stable social authority, the genre recedes, to be replaced by the fully-realized novel.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to maintain a distinction between menippean satire and the novel. Whereas menippean satire functions as a heralding genre in the Bakhtinian theory of the novel, it does not become subsumed by the novel. While there are several contemporary texts that are loosely considered 'novels', such as *Midnight's Children* or *Infinite Jest*, their menippean features extend beyond polyphony to include the radical heterogeneity of their disjunctive tradition.

Heterogeneous form is a particular hallmark of the menippea. The origin of the word satire lies in the Latin *satira*, meaning medley or hotch-potch.<sup>56</sup> It is not inconceivable that in tracing the genealogy of menippean satire it can be generally asserted that the grudging acknowledgement given to works of menippea tended to portray the form as an obscure offshoot of satire as we generally understand the form today: a form which lambastes, seeking to be corrective and critical. However, it would appear that, in actual fact it could be argued that traditional satire is a distortion

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55 Howes, Craig. "Rhetoric of Attack: Bakhtin and the Aesthetics of Satire". *Genre*. 1986 19:3 215-243, pp. 238-39

56 Hight, *The Anatomy of Satire*, p. 18. See also Coffey, Michael, *Roman Satire*. London: Methuen, 1976, pp. 11-23

of the original, pastiche or medley form, and that what we understand as the corrective function of satire is a later, ethical constriction placed upon a form in order to give it *telos* and substance.

In the classical era this 'original' heterogeneity was most noticeable in admixtures of prose and poetry, while in more recent times, this has been noticeable in the mixture of different discourses or genres. A recent example of this is Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, which is composed of a mixture of police report, biography, confession and newspaper article. The work is largely directed against the role of the media in modern society, but also has a stab at the function of art in post-war German society: "From this occurrence [the artist Le Boche catching a drop of Sträubleder's blood from his recently punched nose] plus the preceding acts of violence it should be possible to deduce that Art still has a social function."<sup>57</sup> Without discrimination, however, or without a particular paradigm with which to judge the menippea, it becomes possible to identify the menippea in the form of a newspaper, film or any medium which is composed of or contains a medley or pastiche.

Derrida's arguments relating to genre in his essay "The Law of Genre" are particularly pertinent to a consideration of the menippean genre. While Derrida is addressing the problem of genericity in general, his questioning directly addresses the problematic of the genre of menippean satire itself:

What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the *a priori* of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order and reason?<sup>58</sup>

This is the nature of the dilemma facing any discussion of menippean satire: how can one speak of a genre that only exists by virtue of its axiomatic puncturing of the conditions of its ordering? Rather than speaking confidently of menippean satire as a genre, it is more useful to regard the menippea as exemplary of what Derrida refers to as "the law of the law of genre" which is "precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy."<sup>59</sup> That is, as texts become marked by the trait of the menippea, they also become unmarked because of the necessary impossibility of the closure of the genre and the competence of its taxonomy.

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57 Böll, Heinrich. *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, p. 111.

58 Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Literature*. Ed Derek Attridge. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 225

59 Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 227

The challenge for the study of menippean satire is therefore not to contain it in paradigmatic relations, but to understand what makes the menippea such a difficult form to talk about, to categorise and to explain. This thesis is an attempt to examine precisely those aspects of the menippea, at once formal and cognitive, which have proved so difficult in the past for critics to come to grips with adequately.

#### 4. The Place of this Thesis

No particular theoretical position seems adequate to explain the manifold variety of menippean satire. The theoretical positions adopted in this thesis have been as broad as possible, in order to allow the various historical phases of menippean satire to become apparent in terms that are peculiarly their own. Generally, the approach has been to undertake a synchronic analysis of particular texts, with reference to their specific historical contexts, while also undertaking a complementary, diachronic reading which emphasises the generic affinities and resonances which make the identification of the work as menippean satire salient. The intention is to show the multiplicity of menippean satire in its many contexts, while also showing that a form which has only a discontinuous history (being itself a heterogeneous discontinuity), can be better understood with reference to a larger, disjunctive tradition.

Consequently, the historical scope of this thesis is broad, from the mid-seventeenth century to the present, but restricted to a few central texts only in each chapter. Menippean satires from antiquity through to the renaissance have not been considered in depth for a number of reasons. Ancient menippean satire has attracted that particular tradition of scholarship of its own to which I alluded earlier, a tradition of comprehensive and vigorous debate on the subject within the relatively narrow confines of classical studies, largely without reference to the issues concerning menippean satire that are relevant to contemporary literary theory. Joel Relihan's *Ancient Menippean Satire* (1993) is a qualified exception to this. Even though the scope of his study, which extends from Menippus himself through to Boethius and beyond, makes his work the most authoritative on classical menippean satire, it remains deficient in its overall conception of the genre. Barbara Merry has noted that Relihan's "narrow, conservative definition of Menippean satire [is based] on a strictly limited corpus of texts."<sup>60</sup>

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60 Merry, *Menippean Elements in Paul Scarron's 'Roman Comique'*, p. 24

Menippean satire in the Renaissance is a vast field on its own, and requires separate study. The Renaissance saw the last great flowering of menippean satire as a genre that was cognisant of its heritage and traditions. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, "the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift,"<sup>61</sup> belongs to this period and has been comprehensively treated by Holland. Menippean satire of the period in general, including Burton, has also received full and discerning attention in W. Scott Blanchard's *Scholars' Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance* (1995), although it may appear deficient that Blanchard makes no mention of Holland's thesis.

This thesis is concerned with proposing that an enlarged understanding of the genre of menippean satire enhances the understanding of those works which can be identified as menippean. It is clear that the history of menippean satire requires an approach that examines all works in English that have either been extremely influential, or are particularly pertinent to the illustration of salient menippean themes. For example, the influence of Lucian on English literature is demonstrable in Jonson, Burton, Sterne and Shakespeare, to name but a few. Similarly, menippea in other languages have often had a crucial influence in English. Rabelais, for example, has had an enormous influence, mostly effected through the translation of Sir Thomas Urquhart.

Despite the relative obscurity of the genre, works of menippean satire are far too numerous to be comprehensively listed, let alone discussed, in this thesis. While Eugene Kirk's *Bibliography* extends to 1660, the number of menippea from then onwards is too great to be listed. Indeed, Kirk's own list, which is incomplete, numbers over one thousand entries. The menippea is particularly prevalent in much of what is termed innovative or postmodern in modern fiction, examples being some of the works of Julian Barnes, Kathy Acker, Michael Ondaatje, Gerald Murnane, Salman Rushdie, John Barth, Jeanette Winterson and also in much recent criticism and theory, such as the works of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida.

Though intended as a useful addition to and correction of current perceptions of menippean satire, this thesis is confronted with the difficulty of attempting to comment upon (and to some extent to organize) a vast area of literature — an area of literature made more vast, as it were, by its own assumptions about what menippean satire represents. To adequately account for the many well-known works which have been hitherto neglected as menippean satires would be the work of several theses. It has seemed more profitable to attempt a general survey of some key works, considered in

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61 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 311

their historical context, in order to be able to illuminate aspects of menippean satire that have not attracted the attention required for a fuller understanding of the genre.

## 5. Argumentative Method

The form of argumentation mainly favoured in this thesis is analogism. This is a deliberate, strategic choice, marked as it is by a recurring awareness that theorists of menippean satire often fail to appreciate the irony of a systematic, scholarly study of a genre which unceasingly resists and overturns those systems which pretend to coherence and explanations which exhaust their subject. In many ways, the most appropriate and helpful work on menippean satire would itself be another menippean satire. Kirk has noted that “Menippean satire has never depended for its longevity upon serious endorsement from critics. The form itself suggested imitation.”<sup>62</sup> However, all of the major theorists of menippean satire are exemplary of a kind of adequation between their work and the subject of their work.

Northrop Frye’s now famous definition of the genre as an anatomy involves a central, ironic problem that is left unresolved. As Sherbert has noted, “Frye, like Faust, appear[s] caught in a ceaseless dialectic between the desire to enclose literature within his system and the ironic knowledge that he must fail. No disparagement is intended, but Frye’s critical dilemma agrees with the anatomy genre and the dilemma of its central character, the philosophus gloriosus.”<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, Bakhtin’s approach to his work has the flavour of the menippean throughout, despite attempts by eminent scholars such as Todorov and Holquist to systematise his oeuvre.<sup>64</sup> One example of this is Bakhtin’s authorship of the Medvedev and Vološinov books. The controversy over this, which started in the west with Ivanov’s assertion at a conference that Bakhtin was the author of the Vološinov books *Freudianism* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and Medvedev’s *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* has led to wild speculations and disagreements. A recently published interview with Vadim Kozhinov, one of Bakhtin’s literary executors, however, would seem to put the issue beyond doubt. In

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62 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. xxxii

63 Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, p. 11

64 See Todorov, Tzvetan, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Trans. Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, for an attempt to reinvent Bakhtin as a semiotician and Holquist, Michael, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, London: Routledge, 1990, for an account of Bakhtin as a liberal anti-Marxist.

a letter from Bakhtin to Kozhinov in 1961, Bakhtin apparently admitted, according to Kozhinov, that

Medvedev, Voloshinov [sic.], and I were close friends and when, he said, I wrote these books, we were of one mind. Other works, he wrote in that letter, had nothing to do with me... Let me note that Bakhtin to his last days did not want to admit that he wrote them. Only, on his death bed so to say, he told two men, me and Sergei Bocharov, his other executor, that "This is, after all, my sin and I should acknowledge it." And he said he wrote the books. Elena Aleksandrovna [Bakhtin's wife] long before, when Bakhtin was not present, said to me, "How can you Dimachka (she expressed herself in that way), I did the writing with this very hand, he dictated them to me."<sup>65</sup>

The motive for this is not entirely unrelated to the motive a lot of menippeans have for manufacturing fictional personae or playing with the question of actual authorship. Kozhinov is of the opinion that

As Bocharov and I defined it the books were written as if wearing a mask, and, what is also very important in part is that in these books under Medvedev's and Voloshinov's [sic.] names, there is a very sharp polemic with opponents, which you will not find in other works by Bakhtin. The point is that at this time, the end of the 1920s, such was a necessity of Soviet letters, someone always had to be exposed. And so he did not want to admit that they were his, books written by him... One can

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65 Rzhnevsky, Nicholas. "Kozhinov on Bakhtin". *New Literary History*, Spring 1994 25:2 429-45, p.432 This is corroborated in an article by Bocharov which contains part of the letter by Bakhtin to V. V. Kozhinov stating that he did write the early books by Medvedev and Voloshinov. Dated the Tenth of January, Nineteen Hundred and Sixty One, the letter states:

"The books *The Formal Method* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* are very well known to me. V. N. Voloshinov [sic.] and P. N. Medvedev were my friends; when those books were written, we were working in the closest creative contact. Moreover, those books as well as my study of Dostoevsky are based on a common conception of language and of the verbal work. In this respect V.V. Vinogradov is quite right. I should note that this common conception and our contacts during our work do not diminish the independence and originality of each of the three books. As for the other works by P. N. Medvedev and V. V. Voloshinov [sic.], they are on a different plane and do not reflect the common conception; I took no part whatsoever in their composition.

To this day I hold to the conception of language and speech that was first set forth, incompletely and not always intelligibly, in those books, although the concept has of course evolved in the past thirty years."

Cited in Bocharov, Sergei, "Conversations with Mikhail Bakhtin", *PMLA* 109.5 (1994): 1009-1024.

indicate that they were written by Bakhtin but with the correction that he wrote wearing a mask, so to say.<sup>66</sup>

The other major commentator on the menippea, Eugene Kirk, also appears to have imbibed the menippean spirit, publishing under the name Eugene P. Kirk as well as Eugene Korkowski and “Bud” Korkowski.

Argumentation by analogy is therefore a small but important gesture in the direction of other critics who have allowed an adequation of sorts with the menippea to influence their own writing practices. Writing of the *analogon* in Kant in *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida repeats the phrase “it’s enough to say: abyss and the satire of the abyss”<sup>67</sup> as if underscoring his own textual practice. The menippea is an abyssal site, inhabiting as it does the region of the puncture, be it of the systematicity of thought or of the sovereignty of the mind or of the incontrovertibility of materialism. This thesis has in the main restricted its focus to the satire of the abyss between body and mind and is, in a sense, trying to demonstrate the role the menippea has as a bridge over that abyss as an analogy in its broadest sense. Recourse to analogy as a mode of argumentation in this thesis is largely a responsive adequation to the analogical nature of the menippea and its particular relation to the abyss:

The analogy of the abyss and of the bridge over the abyss is an analogy which says that there must surely be an analogy between two absolutely heterogeneous worlds, a third term to cross the abyss, to heal over the gaping wound and think the gap. In a word, a *symbol*. The bridge is a symbol, it passes from one bank to the other and the symbol is a bridge.<sup>68</sup>

But the recognition of the abyss between the absolute heterogeneity, for example, between the mind and the body, if it is allowed, invites the play of analogy that is one characteristic of menippean satire:

The abyss calls for analogy — the active recourse of the whole *Critique* — but analogy plunges endlessly into the abyss as soon as a certain art is needed to describe analogically the play of analogy.<sup>69</sup>

That is, the analogical description of the play of analogy could serve as one definition of menippean satire if one were to pursue fully the logic of the play of the analogy.

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66 Rzhnevsky, “Kozhinov on Bakhtin”, p. 433

67 Derrida, Jacques. *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 17

68 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 36

69 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 36

## 6. The Grotesque

To state that menippean satire is a grotesque mode of literature requires a careful consideration of the meaning of the term 'grotesque'. There is little doubt that the grotesque is an extremely widespread creative mode. Bakhtin's study of the grotesque in Rabelais has exhaustively detailed the connections between folk-carnivalistic culture and the grotesque, and emphasises the positive aspects of its deeply ambivalent nature, while Kayser has stressed the more negative and alienating aspects of the grotesque, distinguishing between "two basic types of the grotesque which our survey of the graphic arts has helped us to isolate: the 'fantastic' grotesque with its oneiric worlds and the radically 'satiric' grotesque with its play of masks."<sup>70</sup> Bakhtin's use of the term is inseparable from his interpretation of carnival, and as such must be treated with caution.

It can, however, be tentatively posited that two fundamental principles of the grotesque are combination, or perhaps recombination, and play. The combinatory aspect of the grotesque is part of a deeply ambivalent, radical heterogeneity. Although the Romantic grotesque is usually associated with the gothic, theorists such as Schlegel recognised the inseparability of this heterogeneity from an idea of play: "according to fragments 75, 305 and 389, grotesqueness is constituted by a clashing contrast between form and content, the unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical, which is both ridiculous and terrifying."<sup>71</sup>

It is not possible to speak of this heterogeneity without also speaking of play. As Huizinga has noted, seriousness seeks to exclude play whereas play often incorporates seriousness.<sup>72</sup> The grotesque, even in its most negative and terrifying manifestations, is never entirely serious, but incorporates play as an integral part of its heterogeneity. The play element of the grotesque finds its analogy in laughter, especially the laughter of *Witz*. Samuel Weber has written of the "central problem" of Freud's study of laughter as "the relation of *Witz*, as a discursive structure, to the rupture of discursivity entailed in the burst of laughter."<sup>73</sup> As a literary form, the grotesque can

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70 Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963, p. 186

71 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 53

72 Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955, p. 65

73 Weber, Samuel. "Laughing in the Meanwhile". *Modern Language Notes*, 1987 102:4 691–706, p. 700

be considered as a manifestation of this *Witz*. Writing of the generation and engenderment of *Witz*, Nancy states:

The first direction compels us to go back to the first known forms of grotesque and carnivalesque literature, beyond the Latin *satura* and its mixture of genres and prosodies, beyond the scraps of texts of the Cynics, with their witty sayings and their parodies of philosophy, beyond the wordplays sprinkled throughout Plato's dialogues, beyond the very genre of the dialogue, a sophistic genre and the favourite haunt of 'witticisms' — and thus as far back as the first mimes and the birth of comedy and tragedy, as far as the *Witz* of their 'strange combination' ...<sup>74</sup>

The dissolution of the grotesque is also generative: menippean satire as a grotesque form of literature is exemplary of the tendency for form to emerge from apparent decomposition.

The history of the grotesque in art and literature is far too long to be dealt with adequately here, but a brief survey is possible. The term "grotesque" has been acknowledged to have derived from the discovery of *grotesca*, statuettes depicting human forms in fanciful combination with animal and vegetable forms, in the excavations of Titus' baths at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>75</sup> It is somewhat appropriate that the term derived from the Italian for cave, *grotta*, implying an origin in or affiliation with the dark, unknown, chthonic and terrifying.<sup>76</sup> In particular, it helps to account for the largely negative view of the grotesque either as purely ornamental, and hence marginal, or as something dark, surprising and terrifying. But the history of the grotesque is far from being negative and it is the purpose of this thesis to explore the grotesque insofar as it relates to the comic tradition, in particular that of the menippea.

Early theorists of the grotesque did not necessarily regard it as a nugatory or ugly mode. For example, in a dialogue of Francisco de Hollanda, Michelangelo, as one of the interlocutors maintains:

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74 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Birth to Presence*. Trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp. 254-55

75 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 33

76 Ewa Kuryluk notes that "the notion of the cave is central to the proper study of the grotesque." Kuryluk, Ewa, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex. The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987, p. 19. For a fuller discussion of the cave in the grotesque see pp. 19-25.

[A painter will always imitate the details of reality precisely.] But if, in order to observe what is proper to a time and place (*por guardar o decoro melhor ao lugar e ao tempo*), he change (*mudar*) the parts of limbs (as in grotesque work [*obra grutesca*], which would otherwise be without grace and most false) and convert a griffin or a deer downward into a dolphin or upward into any shape he may choose, putting wings in the place of arms, and cutting away the arms if wings are better, this converted limb, of lion or horse or bird, will be most perfect according to its kind (*perfeitissimo como d'aquelle tal genero que elle é*); and this may seem false but can really only be called well invented or monstrous (*bem inventado e monstruoso*). And sometimes it is more in accordance with reason to paint a monstrosity (for the variation and relaxation of the senses and in respect of mortal eyes, that sometimes desire to see that which they never see and think cannot exist) rather than the accustomed figure (admirable though it be) of men and animals; and from this follows the insatiable human desire (*desejo humano*), which sometimes more abhors a building its columns, windows and doors, than another feigned and false *alla grottesca* (*fingido de falso grutesco*), that has columns made of creatures growing out of stalks of flowers, with architraves and cornices of branches or myrtle and doorways of reeds and other things, that seem impossible and irrational (*impossibeis e fora de razão*); yet, it may be very great, if done by one who understands (*se é feito de quem o entende*).<sup>77</sup>

Here Michelangelo is able to find perfection in the skilful execution of the grotesque, avoiding arguments which denigrate the grotesque according to its unnatural subject matter or apparent lack of order. Within a few generations, Montaigne was to give consideration to the grotesque as a literary form, albeit in comparison with the visual arts:

As I was observing the way in which a painter in my employment goes about his work, I felt tempted to imitate him. He chooses the best spot, in the middle of each wall, as the place for a picture, which he elaborates with all his skill; and the empty space all round he fills with grotesques; which are fantastic paintings with no charm than their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, indeed, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together from sundry limbs, with no definite shape, and with no order, sequence, or proportion except by chance?

*Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne*

[A beautiful woman that trails off into fish, Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 4.]

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77 Summers, David. *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 135-36

I am at one with my painter in this second point, but I fall short of him in the other and better part. For my skill is not such that I dare undertake a fine, finished picture that follows the rules of art.<sup>78</sup>

Such modesty, of course, does not prevent Montaigne from essaying forth but at least two crucial points are covered in his introductory remarks. The first is the idea of chance, or the aleatory, as an important aspect of the grotesque. While Montaigne may contend that his skill does not admit undertaking a fine, finished work, he nevertheless proceeds from the above section to borrow from his friend Étienne de la Boétie and consider the topic of friendship. The prefatory remarks on the grotesque are, therefore, the chance event which allows him to launch forth. The second is the confidence in unfinishedness, imperfection, as a worthwhile enterprise in itself. As early as the 1580s, then, there is evidence of an awareness of the grotesque as a positive mode of creation, and it is in the spirit of the affirmative aspects of the grotesque that this thesis proceeds.

In the twentieth century, the most comprehensive study of the grotesque is Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Kayser's work provides a large scale study of the grotesque, although principally in German art and literature. In his attempt to define the grotesque, Kayser writes that "the word 'grotesque' applies to three different realms — the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception — [which] is significant and appropriate as an indication that it has the makings of a basic esthetic category."<sup>79</sup> Although Kayser works toward a definition of the grotesque as a basic aesthetic category his concepts are determined, as Bakhtin notes, by deductions, generalizations and analysis of Romantic and modernist forms of the grotesque.<sup>80</sup>

This appears to be particularly true in Kayser's negative definitions of the grotesque. For example, "The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be summed up in a phrase that has repeatedly suggested itself to us: THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD."<sup>81</sup> This understanding of the grotesque has particular relevance to modernist forms of the grotesque such as the works of Kafka, but does not seem to be an adequate description of the affirmative nature of the grotesque in works such as those of Peacock, Nashe and Rabelais. It is more likely that the grotesque is neither

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78 Montaigne "On Friendship" in Montaigne, Michel de, *Essays*, Trans. J.M. Cohen, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, p. 91

79 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 180

80 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 46-52

81 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 184

affirmative nor negative, but deeply ambivalent, much as Bakhtin perceives carnival to be. What is interesting in Kayser's definition here is the notion of grotesque as structure. He argues at one point that if the grotesque is "an indication of mental responses, or at least the cause of such responses," then it is "necessary to speak of the grotesque — if it is to gain currency as an esthetic category — as a comprehensive structural principle of works of art."<sup>82</sup>

The most intriguing aspect of the grotesque is neither its fantastic oneirism nor its distorting negativity but rather its flexibility as a mode of discovery and experimentation. According to Thomson, Ruskin considered that "all grotesque art is... partly a product of a specially strong urge to play, invent, manipulate — to *experiment*, one might say."<sup>83</sup> This play urge is very closely linked to the operation of the intellect and the imagination:

wherever the human mind is healthy and vigorous in all its proportions, great in imagination and emotion no less than intellect, and not overborne by an undue or hardened pre-eminence of the mere reasoning faculties, there the grotesque will exist in full energy.<sup>84</sup>

The grotesque for Ruskin is also that which does not belong to the realm of the quotidian:

Now all the forms of art which result from the comparatively recreative exertion of minds more or less blunted or encumbered by other cares and toils, the art which we may call generally art of the wayside, as opposed to that which is the business of men's lives, is, in the best sense of the word, Grotesque.<sup>85</sup>

It is this marginality and imperfection which give it its power of invention: "its delightfulness ought mainly to consist *in those very imperfections* which mark it for work done in times of rest."<sup>86</sup>

Arthur Clayborough is even more explicit with regard to the grotesque as a mode of discovery and inquiry. Writing of G.K. Chesterton he states that "it may be a function of the grotesque to make us see the (real) world anew, for a fresh perspective

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82 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 180

83 Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. Methuen, London, 1972, p. 15

84 Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*, Vol 3. 4th edn. Kent: George Allen, 1886, p. 158

85 Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, p. 132

86 Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, p. 132

which, though it be a strange and disturbing one, is nevertheless valid and realistic.”<sup>87</sup> That is, the grotesque is a mode of transformation and discovery, a consequence of its deeply ambivalent nature and of its play aspect. Thomson has noted that it is “likely that the play-urge, the desire to invent and experiment for its own sake, is a factor in all artistic creation, but we can expect this factor to be more than usually strong in grotesque art and literature, where the breaking down and restructuring of familiar reality plays such a large part.”<sup>88</sup> As play can incorporate seriousness, it can also subvert that seriousness, yet at the same time retain the possibility of discovery, of a new vision of the world, a new set of possibilities.

As a grotesque form of literature, menippean satire straddles the nihilistic, the affirmative, the speculative and the silly and represents a bewilderingly heterogeneous field for speculation, imitation and study. As Blanchard has noted

The Menippean satire’s link with both the literary and artistic grotesque lies in its status as a form that breaks generic boundaries and is hence *informis*, without shape or form. As the literary anarchist’s *ars poetica*, it is both profound and silly, and yet it is one of literature’s most interesting deformities.<sup>89</sup>

As one of the more radical versions of the literary grotesque, the menippea ultimately cannot be defined. Rather it can be offered up, time and again, as a point of departure, a site of analogy and an inspiration for imitation and parodic investigation of the new.

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87 Clayborough, Arthur. *The Grotesque in English Literature*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 69

88 Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p. 64

89 Blanchard, W. Scott. *Scholar’s Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995, p. 23

# 2

## Grotesque Transformation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*: The Nose in Menippean Satire

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Sit down now and pray forsooth that the mucus in your nose may not run! Nay, rather wipe your nose and do not blame God!

—DISCOURSES OF EPICETETUS<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Genealogy of the Nose in Comic Literature

One of the key features of menippean satire is the presence of the fantastic. This can take many forms: fantastic diction, fantastic journeys, magical transformations and other improbable, grotesque events. The fantastic in the menippean context is usually another word for the grotesque. That is, it involves an essential heterogeneity of events, images and forms. This chapter will explore this aspect of the grotesque by way of an examination of the term *grotesque transformation*. By this is meant events, either physical or verbal, which involve a heterogeneity in which the terms or the parts which comprise the event are transformative of each other. In this sense, grotesque transformation differs from metaphor, although the difference is one more of degree than kind. Ricoeur's insightful writing on I.A. Richards stresses the inseparability of tenor from vehicle:

Tenor and vehicle are neutral terms with regard to all these confusions [of figure of style and image]. But above all, they prevent one from talking about tenor apart from the figure, and from treating the vehicle as an added ornament. The simultaneous presence of the tenor and vehicle and their interaction engender the metaphor; consequently, the tenor does not remain unaltered, as if the vehicle were nothing but wrapping and decoration.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Epictetus. *Discourses*. 2 Vols. Trans. W. A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925. Bk ii, ch 16, sec. 13

2 Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Trans. Robert Czerny et al. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 81.

This inseparability is dynamic, and involves exchange of meaning both within the metaphor and between words in general:

The process of metaphor in language, the exchange between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor...<sup>3</sup>

Metaphor, conceived of in its most radical context, is transformative of meaning and of perceptions of the world. Neither Richards' "tenor" nor "vehicle" ultimately can remain unchanged by the metaphor which is itself transformative in the broader context of the utterance or the text.

In the context of the grotesque work, or the menippean satire, the tendency of the comic to puncture boundaries and to exceed them pushes each term of the metaphor toward being mutable and mutually transformative. The heterogeneity of the grotesque entails heterogeneous transformations, resulting in the polyphony or multiplicity characteristic of the menippea. There is also the question of the iconography of grotesque transformations: not all grotesque transformations can be reduced to metaphor, simile and other rhetorical tropes. The grotesque has a strong visual and plastic heritage and the menippea is often heavily infused with this iconographic tradition.

While the grotesque transformation is primarily an event involving exchange of meaning, the mutually transformative nature of this exchange also operates, in sophisticated menippea such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, across transformations as well. That is, grotesque transformations become transformative of each other as well as being sites of transformation of meaning. In order to examine the idea of grotesque transformation further, this chapter will focus on the nose, with a synchronic analysis of its functioning in *Midnight's Children*, and a diachronic analysis of the function of the nose in the menippea and related genres.

In Nikolai Gogol's famous story *The Nose*, Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov mysteriously suffers the loss of his olfactory organ. This loss takes on surreal proportions, with an apparently megalomaniacal nose appearing as a state councillor and Kovalyov realising that the loss of his nose has effectively emasculated him. After

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3 Richards, I. A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, pp. 108–9.

seeing an attractive young woman in his noseless state, he is shocked at the incapacity his noseless state has forced upon him:

But suddenly he jumped backwards as though he had been burnt: he remembered that instead of a nose he had nothing, and tears streamed from his eyes. He turned round to tell the nose in uniform straight out that it was only masquerading as a state councillor, that it was an impostor and a scoundrel, and really nothing else than his own private property, *his* nose... But the nose had already gone: it had managed to slip off unseen, probably to pay somebody a visit.<sup>4</sup>

Grouped around the central, nasal figure of the story are a series of satirical episodes which are directed against Tsarist bureaucracy and police, the print media, the medical profession, and marriage, among other things. The nose obviously functions in a way that has direct sexual implications. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin notes that the nose usually had a link with the phallus, a function in general of the folk-carnivalistic conception of the “material lower bodily stratum” in which the features of the face are reflected in the lower parts of the body.<sup>5</sup> In his book on Gogol, Nabokov observes that “Gogol saw with his nostrils”<sup>6</sup> while also noting the deeper cultural resonances that pervade such nose imagery. After discussing Russian nose-humour in general, and proverbs in particular, he writes:

The point to be noted is that from the very start the nose as such was a funny thing to his mind (as to that of all Russians) something sticking out, something not quite belonging to its bearer, and at the same time (that much I may as well concede to the Freudians) something peculiarly and grotesquely masculine.<sup>7</sup>

While there may have been a cultural tradition of nose-humour in Russia at the time Gogol wrote, as well as Gogol’s particular fascination with noses, there was nevertheless the capacity for Gogol’s tale to shock: the phallic connotations of the nose were so well known to his contemporaries that one journal rejected *The Nose* because of the obscenity.<sup>8</sup>

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4 Gogol, Nikolai. *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. Trans. Ronald Wilks. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, pp. 50-51. In a less satirical, but equally grotesque vein, Gaston Leroux has the evil Erik, his Phantom of the Opera, as a noseless freak who perpetrates his crimes out of an unrequited love for Christine Daaé. See Leroux, Gaston, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, New York: Signet, 1987.

5 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 86-87

6 Nabokov, Vladimir. *Nikolai Gogol*. Norfolk, Ct.: New Directions Books, 1944, p. 5

7 Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, p. 5

8 Kanzer, Mark. “Gogol: A Study of Wit and Paranoia”. *JAPA*, 1955 3 110-125.

Another image of the nose is from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, where he writes:

The nose, for example, of which no philosopher has hitherto spoken with respect and gratitude, is nonetheless the most delicate tool we have at our command: it can detect minimal differences in movement which even the spectroscope cannot detect.<sup>9</sup>

Here the extreme delicacy and sensitivity of the nose, its refinement and sophistication, seem to be at variance with the image of Collegiate Assessor Kovalyov's truant nose with all its psycho-sexual resonances. In another menippean satire, Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, Sergeant Pluck comments that "A smell is the most complicated phenomenon in the world... and it cannot be unravelled by the human snout or understood properly although dogs have a better way with smells than we have."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in an article on one of the greatest menippean satires, *The Divine Comedy*, Madison Sowell refers to "the medieval exegetical tradition which associates the nose with the gift of discernment (cf. St. Gregory)."<sup>11</sup>

What Nietzsche's and Gogol's images have in common is not the characterisation of the organ but rather the form of each work in which that characterisation appears. Nietzsche's style in *Twilight of the Idols* and in other works, is a medley of aphorisms, poetry, notebook entries and a somewhat bombastic philosophical analysis, a combination which is a formal characteristic of menippean satire. *The Nose* also belongs to this genre, and both works are grotesque to a certain degree, in form and in imagery. The commonality of generic features in each work therefore indicates aspects of each work that would not be entirely apparent had that genre identification not been made.

In Nietzsche's and Gogol's use of the nose two themes of the nose's functioning in menippean satire are evident. On the one hand is the sense of refinement: its delicacy, its proximity to the brain and the implied connection with the intellect and the unconscious. A digressive illustration of this aspect of the nose is Mercutio's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* which mentions Queen Mab, the fairies' midwife who delivered sleeping men of their dreams, but also stole children and replaced them with changelings:

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9 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols AND The Anti-Christ*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p. 46.

10 O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*, p. 143

11 Sowell, Madison. "Dante's Nose and Publius Ovidius Naso: A Gloss on *Inferno* 25:45". *Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of Canadian Society of Italian Studies*, 1989 10:1-2 166, p. 166

she comes  
in shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the fore-finger of an alderman,  
Drawn with a team of little atomies  
Athwart men's noses as they sleep<sup>12</sup>

A similar figuring of the nose occurs in a Byzantine satire, *Peri ton kat' afton pathlimaton*, also known as *The Life of Timarion*. It tells the story of Timarion, the narrating titular hero, under the reign of Romanos IV, who returns to his body after his death: "Re-entering his body, Timarion finds it has grown cold and clammy; his soul enters by the nostrils, and he walks back to Byzantium."<sup>13</sup>

The question of the shape of the nose also bears upon the theme of refinement. Alfred David has traced the changing significance of the relation between the shape of one's nose and one's moral character in his "Iconography of Noses." While he correctly points out that interest in and assumptions about the nose vary from age to age, he cites Della Porta's *De Humana Physiognomia*, where Angelo Poliziano's nose is referred to as "extremely disproportionate and, therefore, he had a piercing and jealous mind, praising his own works and mocking those of others."<sup>14</sup> This compares with the type of nose that appears in late medieval portraiture where the noses of kings, such as that of Richard II in the Wilton Diptych, differ little from those of angels or of the Virgin. While this comes from a period where kings were still pictured in accordance with an idealized type, that type is one where a seemly nose suggests a refinement that a snub nose, for example, does not.<sup>15</sup>

A recent example of the nose in its grotesque and comic aspect as a displaced penis occurs in J. G. Ballard's menippean satire *The Atrocity Exhibition*:

Much of Travis' thought concerns what he terms "the lost symmetry of the blastosphere" — the primitive precursor of the embryo that is the last structure to preserve perfect symmetry in all planes. It occurred to Travis that our own bodies may conceal the rudiments of a symmetry not only

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12 Shakespeare, *William. Romeo and Juliet*. Ed T. J. B. Spencer. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971. I iv 53ff.

13 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. 43, citing *Peri ton kat' afton pathlimaton. Die Lieder Timarion's*, Ed. Adolf Ellissen, *Aneleckten der mittel-und neugriechischen Literatur*, Leiden, 1855-62. Vol. 4 (1860) A summary with partial English translation is in H.F. Tozer's "Byzantine Satire," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 2 (1881), 233-70.

14 David, Alfred. "An Iconography of Noses," in Chance, Jane and Wells, R. O., *Mapping the Cosmos*. Houston: Rice University Press, 1985, p. 89

15 David, "An Iconography of Noses," p. 85. In the same article, David notes (p. 89) that Winckelman found the Greek nose of antiquity inherently more beautiful than the Semitic nose.

about the vertical axis but also the horizontal. One recalls Goethe's notion that the skull is formed of modified vertebrae — similarly, the bones of the pelvis may constitute the remnants of a lost sacral skull. The resemblance between symmetries of lung and kidney has long been noted. Other correspondences of respiratory and urinogenital function come to mind, enshrined both in popular mythology (the supposed equivalence in size of nose and penis) and in psychoanalytic symbolism (the "eyes" are a common code for testicles)...<sup>16</sup>

Although the patent exteriority of the nose lends itself to equation with the penis, the nostrils have an interiority that can be equated with the female genitalia, as evident in Pynchon's menippean satire, *V*. At the end of a rather gruesome session of rhinoplasty, Esther Harvitz finds herself aroused:

She was sexually turned on, was all: as if Schoenmaker had located and flipped a secret switch or clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity. A cavity is a cavity, after all: Trench's gift for metaphor might have been contagious.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the traditional, or folk-carnivalistic aspect of the nose-genital relation, it has also figured in scientific discourse. In the most famous of all Renaissance physiognomy books, *De Humana Physiognomia*, Della Porta notes that the "nose corresponds to the rod",<sup>18</sup> a belief echoed at the beginning of the twentieth century by Freud's associate Wilhelm Fliess.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Jeffrey Masson has argued that "Fliess's operation on the nose of Freud's patient, Emma Eckstein (a needless procedure which caused her to bleed almost to death), shaped the evolution of psychoanalysis."<sup>20</sup>

Distortions, mutilations, injuries and obsessiveness in relation to the nose usually have a coarseness to them, implying genital dysfunction or sexual failure. It is not the case, of course, that these aspects occur separately. In *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, Martinus Scriblerus notes that "Poetry is a *natural* or morbid Secretion from the Brain. As I would not suddenly stop a Cold in the Head, or dry up my Neighbour's Issue, I

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16 Ballard, J. G. *The Atrocity Exhibition*. London: Triad Granada, 1985, p. 13

17 Pynchon, Thomas. *V*. London: Vintage, 1995, p. 109

18 David, "An Iconography of Noses," in Chance and Wells, *Mapping the Cosmos*, p. 82

19 Kerrigan, John. "A Complete History of Comic Noses" in Corder, Michael; Holland, Peter; and Kerrigan, John. *English Comedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 241

20 Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*. New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 38, citing Masson's work "The Assault on Truth"

would as little hinder him from necessary Writing.”<sup>21</sup> This comic nosology works ambivalently, with the nose depicted as linked to the intellect, but at the same time functioning as “the anus of the brain”.<sup>22</sup> Another example of this is Martin Gardner’s anecdote of Kierkegaard, who “once imagined a philosopher sneezing while recording one of his profound sentences. How could such a man, Kierkegaard wondered, take his metaphysics seriously?”<sup>23</sup> Here the nose is simultaneously genital, in an orgasmic sense, and excretory, and both aspects of the lower material bodily stratum are comically contrasted with the philosopher’s metaphysical endeavours.

Similarly, in the prelude to the *Gay Science*, “Joke, Cunning and Revenge,” Nietzsche writes in Verse 58:

*A Crooked Nose*  
Its nostrils proud and pliant,  
The nose looks out defiant.  
That’s why, a rhino without horn,  
You fall forward, proud little man;  
And straight pride generally grows  
Together with a crooked nose.<sup>24</sup>

here the grotesqueness of a crooked nose is not linked to sexual dysfunction, but is rather an empowering thing — supplementing, in a paradoxical way the “straight” phallic pride the proboscis suggests.

A paradigmatic example of this bifurcated aspect of the nose occurs in a Japanese novel called *Wagahai wa Neko de aru (I am a Cat)* by Natsume Sōseki. The narrator, an unnamed cat, is resident in the house of the teacher Mr. Sneaze, an unashamed would-be dilettante who is the butt of the jokes of his even more dilettantish friends. Desiring to write prose, or haiku, or even paint water colours, he cuts a ridiculous figure. One afternoon, as he is attempting to write an epitaph for the “Mr. the-late-and-sainted Natural Man” who, he eventually writes, was “born into infinity, studied infinity and died into infinity”, he is asked by his wife to provide more money for the house-keeping, money which is frittered away upon books he never reads. The time is

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21 Scriblerus, Martinus [Pope, Alexander and Arbuthnot, John]. *The Art of Sinking in Poetry: Martinus Scriblerus’ ΠΕΡΙ ΒΑΘΟΥΣ*. Ed Edna Leake Steeves. Bennington: King’s Crown Press, 1952, p. 12

22 Kerrigan, “A Complete History of Comic Noses” in *English Comedy*, p. 242

23 Carroll, Lewis [Charles Dodgson]. *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Ed. Martin Gardner. Illus. John Teniel. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p. 15

24 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1974, p.65

the late Meiji period, as traditional Japanese customs and practices are beginning to be eroded by the progressive influx of Western ideas:

"What is it?" My master's voice sounds dully like a gong struck under water. His wife seems not to like the answer, for she starts all over again. "My dear!" she says.

"Well, what is it?" This time, cramming a thumb and index finger into a nostril, he yanks out nostril-hairs.

"We are a bit short this month..."

"Couldn't possibly be short. We've settled the doctor's fee and we paid off the bookshop's bill last month. So this month, there ought in fact to be something left over." He coolly examines his uprooted nostril-hairs as though they were some wonder of the world.

"But because you, instead of eating rice, have taken to bread and jam..."

"Well, how many tins of jam have I gone through?"

"This month, eight tins were emptied."

"Eight? I certainly haven't eaten that much."

"It wasn't only you. The children also lick it."

"However much one licks, one couldn't lick more than two or three shillings' worth." My master calmly plants his nostril-hairs, one by one, on the writing pad. The sticky-rooted bristles stand upright on the paper like a little copse of needles. My master seems impressed by this unexpected discovery and he blows upon them. Being so sticky, they do not fly away.

"Aren't they obstinate?" he says and blows upon them frantically.

"It is not only the jam. There's other things we have to buy." The lady of the house expresses her extreme dissatisfaction by pouting sulkily.

"Maybe." Again inserting his thumb and forefinger, he extracts some hairs with a jerk. Among these hairs of various hue, red ones and black ones, there is a single pure white bristle. My master who, with a look of great surprise, has been staring at this object, proceeds to show it to his wife, holding it up between his fingers right in front of her face.

"No, don't." She pushes his hand away with a grimace of distaste.

"Look at it! A white hair from the nostrils." My master seems to be immensely impressed. His wife, resigned, went back into the living room with a laugh. She seems to have given up any hope of getting any answer to her problems of domestic economy. My master resumes his considerations of the problems of Natural Man.<sup>25</sup>

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25 Sōseki, Natsume, *I am a Cat*, Vol 1., Trans. Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson. Rutland: Tuttle, 1972. pp. 141-142

Sōseki was a lecturer in English literature at Tokyo Imperial University and therefore thoroughly familiar with English literature. There can be little doubt that the sprawling, comic *Wagahai wa Neko de Aru* owes as much to *Tristram Shandy* as it does to Japanese idiomatic forms, such as *rakugo* or “falling-word” comic extemporaneous narrative.<sup>26</sup> Sakuko Matsui notes in her work *Natsume Sōseki as a Critic of English Literature* that “before writing *I am a Cat* Sōseki had read Rabelais more recently than Sterne... it is nevertheless interesting to note that Sōseki, through the mouth of the mischievous Meitei (a character in *I am a Cat*), gives the impression to his readers of having just discovered Sterne, while he makes no mention whatsoever of Rabelais.”<sup>27</sup> Further, Sōseki had written an article on *Tristram Shandy* in 1897<sup>28</sup> and was aware of borrowings from Burton and Rabelais. Sōseki’s *I am a Cat* is therefore considerably influenced by menippean satire.

The nose is taken up as the embodiment of the pathetic teacher, Sneaze. He is absurd, obtuse, finding the pickings from his own nose of more interest than either his domestic problems or even the epitaph he is attempting to write. The single white bristle extracted from his nostril makes more of an impact upon him as a signifier of mortality than does his own impecuniosity or his literary meditations upon eternity and death. In fact, the nostril hairs have more permanence on his page than his own writing, which is constantly effaced, changed, or crumpled up: at one point he transforms one line of his writing into a drawing of a face with a “nostrilled nose”. The rejectamenta of the nose have a satirical significance that is also evident in Swift’s poem *A Lady’s Dressing Room*. The young lover Strephon has stolen into the room of his love, Celia, and is shocked by the evidence of her body in soiled garments, chamber pots and so on:

The Virtues we must not let pass,  
Of *Celia’s* magnifying Glass.  
When frighted *Strephon* cast his Eye on’t  
It shew’d the Visage of a Gyant.  
A Glass that can to Sight disclose,  
The smallest Worm in *Celia’s* Nose,  
And faithfully direct her Nail  
To squeeze it out from Head to Tail;  
For catch it nicely by the Head,  
It must come out alive or dead.<sup>29</sup>

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26 In the introduction to their translation of *I Am a Cat*, Graeme Wilson and Akiko Ito list some of Sōseki’s reading while in England, which included *Tristram Shandy*.

27 Matsui, Sakuko. *Natsume Soseki as a Critic of English Literature*. Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1975, p. 44

28 Matsui, *Natsume Sōseki as a Critic of English Literature*, p. 44

29 Swift, Jonathan. “The Lady’s Dressing Room”, in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*. Ed. Harold Williams. 2nd. edn Vol. 2. [3 Vols.] Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958. p.527 ll. 59-68

These worms, like the nostril-hairs so painstakingly removed from the nose, are the “worms” of satire, representing both the grotesque aspect of bodily representations in menippean satire and also a direct, unmediated extraction from the brain, or intellect. Here, the body is presented as the unconscious itself — it reveals what the conscious cannot. Sneaze is really only aware of the significance of mortality from the presence of his one, white nostril hair, while he remains curiously insensitive to his epitaph. Similarly, given that in the *Battle of the Books* Swift writes “Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders generally discover everybody’s face but their own”<sup>30</sup> it is clear that the worms are the essential focus of a satire which stresses the inescapability of the body and the order which emerges from apparent bodily disorder. This is clear from the closing couplet: “Such Order from Confusion sprung/ Such gaudy Tulips rais’d from Dung.”<sup>31</sup>

## 2. The Nose in *Midnight’s Children*

*Midnight’s Children* is an almost unequalled exploration of the comic possibilities of the nose in modern fiction. The nose is introduced early on, setting the keynote for the text:

One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies. Lurching back...he resolved never again to kiss earth for any god or man. This decision however, made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history.<sup>32</sup>

Here there is the familiar insistence on the material in a position of dominance over the spiritual, with the blow to the nose a sign of symbolic castration or a mockery of virility. Aadam Aziz’s vulnerability to women and history is evident in his eventual unhappy marriage to Naseem Ghani, the obdurate Reverend Mother of the novel, and there is the larger theme of the role of history as a series of grotesque, inescapably bodily events in opposition to the notion of history as objective discourse. This is further emphasised by the advice the malodorous boatman Tai gives Aadam Aziz:

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30 Swift, Jonathan. “Battle of the Books” in *A Tale of A Tub And Other Works*. Ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 104

31 Swift, “The Lady’s Dressing Room”, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, p.527 ll. 141-44

32 Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight’s Children*. London: Picador, 1981, p. 10

Tai tapped his left nostril. "You know what this is nakkoo? It's the place where the outside world meets the world inside you. If they don't get on, you feel it here. Then you rub your nose with embarrassment to make the itch go away. A nose like that, little idiot, is a great gift. When it warns you, look out or you'll be finished. Follow your nose and you'll go far."<sup>33</sup>

The role of the nose, then, is as the meeting point of subjective and objective, internal and external, spiritual and material. While the nose is, after Tristram Shandy, "Only a nose", its function in menippean satire is to break down binary distinctions, or to evade them altogether. White observes the correlate of this in the grotesque version of history that results from the series of grotesque transformations that characterise the work: "What we have is a profoundly useful breakdown of categories — not unlike a falling of walls between disciplines in our own world of academia — whereby history is no longer a solid edifice of what-happened-nextism (no more than this novel is) but is itself allied with dream, invention, myth and prophecy. Above all, it is ultimately not a polar opposite of fiction but its mirrored other, as Saleem Sinai is of India."<sup>34</sup> It is therefore at the nexus of a contestation of 'truth', and in particular, raises the question of the role of carnival in relation to history and in relation to power.

According to theorists such as Umberto Eco, the "upside-downness" of the carnival world is a mere inversion, a semiotic event. The carnival is allowed; its licence derives from the recognition of the need for release. Nothing is changed by the carnival — it cannot alter a structure which allows its very existence.<sup>35</sup> This is a purely synchronic analysis of the relationship between the carnival and power which emphasizes the containment of the carnival by power structures *within* society and *their* determination of history.

The flaw in this argument is that it does not take into account the grotesque, meiotic process of carnival. A diachronic analysis of the relation between carnival and society looks beyond the mere inversion, or the "world upside down", that the synchronic analysis stresses. It looks at the temporary disruption that occurs with various power relations in society: disruptions like ritual abuse, the power of festive laughter, and the crowning and decrowning of the carnival king. More important is the grotesque

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33 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, pp. 17-18

34 White, Jonathan. "Politics and the Individual: Gordimer and Rushdie", in White, Jonathan. [Ed]. *Recasting the World: Writing After Colonialism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. pp. 238-9

35 Eco, *Carnival!*, pp. 1-9

principle of the carnivalistic *mésalliance*, both actual and conceptual: comic mismatches, deliberately absurd couplings, and, in carnivalistic literature, a vast synthetic heterogeneity that either fuses or juxtaposes different discourses that are usually separate. This process creates the impression of a world in which ‘truth’, or at least ontological categories, become relativised. There is a progressive shifting of meaning that, once the carnival is in full flight, becomes dissociated. Its one anchor point is the experience of the festive body. The anarchic, in terms of the copulatory, olfactory, defecatory and the ingesting body constantly defeats attempts to contain it. The graffiti on the wall outside St. Stephen’s in Newtown, “Does Frazer [sic] control your bowels ?” is illustrative of this.<sup>36</sup>

It is also possible to counter Eco’s objections by other means. M. Keith Booker raises similar objections to Eco, with a kind of “safety-valve” critique of carnival:

After all, the carnival is an authorized site of transgression, a sanctioned form of “subversion,” and one might argue that its very purpose is to sublimate and defuse the social tensions that might lead to genuine subversion — a sort of opiate of the masses.<sup>37</sup>

Such an argument confuses the *telos* of authority’s discourse of carnival (one of release and control) with the *telos* of carnival. If there is any *telos* to carnival at all, it would appear to reside in the exuberant transgression and (temporary) transformation of boundaries and genres. Eco notes that “without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible.”<sup>38</sup> But the opposite could also be stated to be the case: that without the meiotic confusion and chaos of carnival, authority would have nothing to predicate itself against. In other words, play as the condition of meaning precludes the possibility of confidently predicating the superiority of (or ultimately the difference between) one or the other.

There are further ways of seeing the positive, liberating possibilities of carnival. One is to see the interaction between carnival and authority as an economy in the Freudian sense of the term. The tendency of carnival imagery to be the inverse of the everyday world lends itself to a mode of thinking about carnival as in an economy with the everyday world. In the sense in which Bataille uses the term, the interplay between

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36 Malcolm Fraser, conservative prime minister of Australia 1975-83.

37 Booker, M. Keith. *Flann O’Brien, Bakhtin, and Menippean Satire*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 82

38 Eco, *Carnival!*, p. 6

carnival and the everyday world is a general economy.<sup>39</sup> In “From Restricted to General Economy”, Derrida seems to hint at this when he refers to the “economy of life” in distinguishing between Hegel’s notion of lordship and Bataille’s notion of sovereignty. In discussing the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, he writes “this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning; henceforth, everything covered by the name lordship collapses into comedy.”<sup>40</sup> There is a similarity here to the logic of laughter in “reduced laughter” rather than “carnival laughter”. The notion of carnival laughter finds Bakhtin at his most optimistic, but it is a notion that has increasingly less relevance for the ages following the renaissance where the “great trunk of carnival” becomes diffuse and forms such as irony, sarcasm and parody as we understand it today become prevalent.<sup>41</sup> In the notion of reduced laughter, the form-shaping ideology of carnival laughter “still permeates the image or scene but explicit humor provoking outright laughter is either absent or muffled.”<sup>42</sup> This would suggest that all forms of “lordship” which may be seen to belong to the realm of everyday life are susceptible to the logic of reduced laughter, and in fact in the present post-carnival age are in a state of continual transformation, continually defining themselves against such laughter.

If one were to approach the question of authority from the perspective of responsibility, then Derrida has some salient observations with regard to the question of the legitimacy of subversion of the carnival:

The exercise of responsibility seems to leave no choice but this one, however uncomfortable it may be, of paradox, heresy, and secrecy. More serious still, it must always run the risk of conversion and apostasy: there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine.<sup>43</sup>

Here, the sense of the grotesque as that which is marginal, heterodox and to a certain extent, dissenting becomes an important rejoinder to the notion of responsibility that animates many discourses on authority. Its inevitability would suggest the possibility of the centrality of carnivalesque transgression to any discourse of authority, even if it

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39 Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Zone, 1988.

40 Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Ed and Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 255-56.

41 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 120

42 Morson, Gary Saul and Emerson, Caryl. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 464

43 Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Trans. David Wills. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995, p. 27

appears in the guise of subordinate, licensed play. In many ways the prevalence of the mask in carnival may be seen as analogous to the “masking” of the comic tradition with respect to its more dangerous ideas — the overcoming of boundaries, the importance of excess (and waste) and even the creative possibilities of violence.<sup>44</sup>

If it is possible to see the liberating possibilities of carnival, then the same premises are applicable to the carnivalesque, if one follows Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalisation of literary genres.<sup>45</sup> In a newspaper article from 1982, Rushdie writes of the new literatures that can roughly be described as post-colonial, including Derek Walcott, G.V. Desani and Toni Morrison. While the authors cited have in common what Rushdie describes as a non-English English, he cites as predecessors of this new wave of post-colonial fiction the Irish menippean trio of O’Brien, Beckett and Joyce.<sup>46</sup> Clearly the menippean form, in its not so distant modernist flourishing, has set a precedent for the possibility of innovation, invention and renewal in terms of its grotesque form. The use of comic modes, particularly the menippea, has usually met with some resistance from critics once discussion moves onto a political plane. For example, Richard Cronin has accused Rushdie of an absence of intelligent political thinking, no doubt as a consequence of the fantastic, and often contradictory menippean form that Rushdie employs.<sup>47</sup> However, without naming the menippean form, Jonathan White recognises the particular liberating possibilities of this grotesque form, writing that “I would go so far as to claim that certain novels have been written with this consideration — the novel as an alternative way of doing history and politics — uppermost in mind.”<sup>48</sup> The plurality, or heterogeneity of forms that constitutes the menippea also offers, particularly in politically sensitive areas, alternative ways of confronting monological or authoritarian discourses, and renewing their meaning along the lines of the carnival.

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44 Bernstein, Michael André. *Bitter Carnival. Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Focusing on Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment*, Bernstein concentrates on the apparently more ‘negative’ aspects of the carnivalesque.

45 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, pp. 132-37.

46 Rushdie, Salman. “The Empire Writes Back With a Vengeance”, in *London Times*, July 3 1982, p. 8

47 Cronin, Richard. “The Indian English Novel: *Kim* and *Midnight’s Children*”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 33, no.2 (1987):210-11: “neither Kipling nor Rushdie strikes me as a political thinker worth taking seriously”, p. 210

48 White, “Politics and the Individual: Gordimer and Rushdie”, in *Recasting the World: Writing After Colonialism*, p. 209

The process of experiencing the carnival as an event with a rudimentary narrative structure of disruption, inversion, dissociation and recombination allows a view of carnival as a meiotic, and if not liberating, then a realigning process. Although power licenses carnival, it does not always control it, as is clear in the number of uprisings and revolutions that have occurred during carnival time. Guha's listing of such instances includes Wat Tyler's incursion into London on the morning of Corpus Christi, 13 June 1381; the beginning of the great series of peasant revolts during Fastnacht 1525; the conversion of a carnival featuring Mère Folle and her Infanterie into a riot in masquerade against the royal tax officials in Dijon in 1630; the coincidence of some of the jacqueries of 1789 in France with Sundays and feast days; and the threat of a massive uprising in the year of the mutiny in Bombay during Muharram and Diwali.<sup>49</sup> Although Guha notes that instances of licensed inversion serve to buttress rather than destroy or weaken a social order, the liminal nature of the carnival has an ambiguity that enables it to elude or "slip through" the classificatory networks that constitute cultural space.<sup>50</sup> This liminality of carnival does not necessarily favour forces of insurrection: Ladurie's *Carnival in Romans* illustrates the ruthless exploitation of carnival licence by figures of authority in late medieval France.<sup>51</sup>

A literary example of the carnival is Slawkenbergius' Tale in *Tristram Shandy*, in which a mysterious stranger with an enormous facial member sets the whole city of Strasbourg into turmoil. The women and men all obsessively desire to touch it, while at the same time they are deeply concerned with its reality: is it made of paper, brass, a pudding's end, a fir-tree or a fiddle-stick? The ensuing debate involves theological controversy, and ultimately a political overthrow, with the city being occupied by the French. The Strasbourgers' loss of freedom is due to the fact that the political, the theological and power itself are subordinated to the principles of the grotesque as a syncretic<sup>52</sup> and anarchic event. In some ways this can be seen as prophetic of the French Revolution, with the basic carnivalistic narrative of disruption, terror, tyranny and restoration. Gerald Gillespie writes of Kreuzgang, the central character of

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49 Guha, Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 31

50 Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, pp. 30-31

51 Ladurie, Emmanuel Le Roy. *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579-1580*. Trans. Mary Feeney. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, passim.

52 "Syncretism [is] understood as the juxtaposition of various points of view on a specific object." Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 110.

Bonaventura's *Nachtwachen*, that as "an erstwhile puppet-master he regards the French Revolution — as Jean Paul suggested — as a colossal farce, a bloody exhibition in *commedia* style."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Derrida refers to Patočka's view of the French Revolution as a "new rise of orgiastic floodwaters" that "remains forever immanent and that corresponds to an abdication of responsibility."<sup>54</sup>

A further example is to be found in *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind. The central character, the grotesque Grenouille, manufactures a perfume from the bodies of beautiful young women he has murdered. He is caught and sentenced to death but on the day of his execution he wears the perfume he has distilled from the bodies of the young women. The result is that he is perceived as the most beautiful being imaginable. He is able to walk free after everyone deems it impossible that such a glorious creature could have committed murder. The perfume also acts as the ultimate aphrodisiac, inciting a mass orgy among those who came to witness the execution. The nose in this instance is depicted as the vulnerable part of the body politic. It is susceptible to licentious suggestion and also to the most subtle stimulation (the assembled public copulate indiscriminately, but not without regarding Grenouille as the paragon of nobility, beauty and virtue). The events that surround the trial and eventual release of Grenouille also demonstrate the subordination of juridical and ethical considerations to the grotesque seen in terms of the body politic.

Yet while the nose may be the vulnerable part of the body politic, it is the salient mask and escape from the politically oppressive as far as the individual is concerned. For example, in an early episode of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's maternal grandfather barely escapes the notorious Amritsar massacre by virtue of a fortuitous sneeze which leads him to drop his "doctori-attaché case. As he searches for it on the ground, Brigadier Dyer and his soldiers let loose their "one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd" and Aadam Aziz escapes unscathed.<sup>55</sup>

In *Midnight's Children*, the nose is central to the grotesque principle of subordinating truth to the carnivalistic narrative process of dissociation and recombination. As the boatman Tai tells Aadam Aziz:

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53 Gillespie, "Romantic Irony and the Grotesque" in Garber, Frederick [ed], *Romantic Irony*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988, p. 334

54 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 21

55 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 36

“That’s a nose to start a family on, my princeling. There’d be no mistaking whose brood they were. Mughal Emperors would have given their right hands for noses like that one. There are dynasties waiting inside it,” — and here Tai lapsed into coarseness — “like snot.”<sup>56</sup>

Dynasties are like snot, in that as a detrusion of the intellect or spirit, there is a meaning to be attached to them. There is also a sense in which a nasal genealogy comically “doubles” that of the genital lineage. Alfred David has noted the influence on literature and “scientific” thought of Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente*, the four volume work of the “father of physiognomy” published in 1775-78.<sup>57</sup> Apart from the remarkable effort put into interpretation of physiognomical features, and the moral to be drawn from such interpretations, Lavater’s work includes a classification of ethnic noses. This effectively centres on the nose to articulate and confirm prejudices already current, and was influential in the following century’s view that the nose is a genealogical trait, part of a pseudo-scientific discourse which David claims helped to lay the foundations for modern racism.<sup>58</sup>

Saleem Sinai’s nose enables him to partake, if not wholly successfully, of the Sinai patrimony, despite his dubious parentage. Dynasties are also like snot in that they are a discontinuous discharge subject to the vicissitudes of history. It is the nose which brings forth and maintains generations, not the genitals. (Walter Shandy “would often declare... that he did not conceive how the greatest family in England could stand it out against an uninterrupted succession of six or seven short noses.”<sup>59</sup>) Saleem’s lineage is a grotesque, not biological, lineage. This principle is also part of a larger, radical vision of how history can be seen to work from a perspective that eschews institutionalised political action as a viable option. The political threat of the children of midnight is due to their apoliticality and their utopian vision. It is also due to the fact that, like Tristram, Saleem’s lineage is of undecidable origins.<sup>60</sup> Hawes notes that the

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56 Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, p. 13

57 David, “An Iconography of Noses”, in Chance & Wells, *Mapping the Cosmos*, pp. 89-93

58 David, “An Iconography of Noses”, in Chance & Wells, *Mapping the Cosmos*, p. 93

59 Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Ed. Ian Campbell Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 175

60 Tristram’s nose may well have been the legacy of his paternal great-grandfather, and not a result of his birth. Also, according to the chronology of *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram is an eight-month child. This suggests that Tristram was not conceived in the famous clock-winding scene, but a month earlier. In addition, the presence of Yorick and the black page interrupts the account of Tristram’s genealogy, suggesting perhaps that a similar interruption occurred in the February of 1718. What can be inferred from this is a doubt as to the veracity of Tristram’s origins.

“theme of undecidable origins decisively challenges retrospective acts, whether biographical or collective, of narrating the progress of some essence.”<sup>61</sup>

The grotesque, therefore, is a strategy for confronting power. Saleem remarks that:

perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque.<sup>62</sup>

And again, on a slightly different tack:

the children of midnight were also the children *of the time*: fathered, you understand, by history.<sup>63</sup>

Like the patrimony of the Azizes, the conception of the children of midnight results in a disjunctive birth that opposes that which created it, becoming a site for the contestation of truth. The legitimacy not only of Indian political history but also of history itself is called into question through a grotesque concept of time that resists linearity and resists official, or normative versions of history. Saleem at one stage notes that:

The body, on the other hand, is homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger... has undone all that. Thus we enter into a state of affairs which is nothing short of revolutionary; and its effect on history is bound to be pretty damn startling. Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come tumbling out.<sup>64</sup>

Grotesque transformations, therefore, are an integral part of the menippean satirisation of truths; of the satirisation or abuse, in this case, of historical discourse. Clement Hawes writes of *Midnight's Children*:

Rushdie's gesture of reaching back to the moment of *Tristram Shandy* can be seen, finally and most crucially, as a telling commentary on certain strategies of history-writing. It is less an attempt to overthrow imperial historiography than to resituate it..<sup>65</sup>

His comments could easily be rephrased so that it is the “moment of the menippean” that makes possible Rushdie's gesture of political re-evaluation.

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61 Hawes, Clement. “Leading History By the Nose: The Turn to the Eighteenth century in *Midnight's Children*”. *Modern Fiction Studies*, Spring 1993 39:1 147–168, p. 151

62 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 109

63 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 118

64 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 237

65 Hawes, “Leading History by the Nose: the Turn to the Eighteenth century in *Midnight's Children*”, p. 158

Grotesque transformations tend to organise the work into “knots” or clusters of images, each of which marks an important stage in the evolution and even devolution of meaning in *Midnight's Children*. An example is the “Black Mango” incident. Saleem is hiding in the laundry basket in the bathroom, in which he says he was “concealed from the demands of parents and history”,<sup>66</sup> when his mother comes in, having just resumed contact with her erstwhile husband, Nadir Khan. When Saleem’s mother disrobes and bends over to pick up her dress, he is confronted by the sight of the “Black Mango”, her dark buttocks and vulva. At this crucial moment he sniffs, with “nose-goo flowing upwards, against gravity, against nature... Snot rockets through a breached dam”<sup>67</sup> until, orgasmically, Saleem attains his telepathic powers. At the juncture of nose as sexual symbol and nose as delicate sensing organ linked to the intellect, a grotesque transformation occurs that is the paradigm for all other subsequent transformations. It is a disruptive and a disjunctive transformation, but it is also the critical moment at which the revaluation of history begins. Significantly, this is an instance of the grotesque as an empowering strategy, in which the disruptive and the unruly not only stand in opposition to the monological, in this case imperial history, but also offer a critique of that history.

An example from another time and place suffices to demonstrate this. In one of Poe’s early satirical ‘grotesques’, “Lionizing”, a duel between the narrator and the Elector Bluddennuff results in the narrator, a student of Nosology (with a deliberate play on “Nosology” as the study of diseases) shooting off the nose of the Elector. The result is surprisingly the opposite of what one would expect:

“Father,” I asked, “what is the chief end of my existence?”

“My son,” he replied, “it is still the study of Nosology; but in hitting the Elector upon the nose you have overshot your mark. You have a fine nose, it is true; but then Bluddennuff has none. You are damned, and he has become the hero of the day. I grant you that in Fum-Fudge the greatness of a lion is in proportion to the size of his proboscis — but, good heavens! there is no competing with a lion who has no proboscis at all.”<sup>68</sup>

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66 Hawes, “Leading History by the Nose: the Turn to the Eighteenth century in *Midnight's Children*”, p. 156

67 Hawes, “Leading History by the Nose: the Turn to the Eighteenth century in *Midnight's Children*”, p. 162

68 Poe, Edgar Allan. *Comedies and Satires*. Ed. David Galloway. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, p. 30

Clearly, there is an advantage in the grotesque, one which is capable of not only standing in opposition to the “classical” or monological, for want of a better term, but also of undermining its authority. Significantly, this empowering aspect of the grotesque has been remarked upon by John Arnold. In his article on the same story he notes that “so far as critical attention and commentary is concerned, there has been no competing with the most impotent, the most physically injured, of all Poe’s characters — whose emblematic zig-zag fissure is reflected by zig-zag scar [sic.] down the emaciated frame of Ahab — the ‘lionized’ Roderick Usher.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, Lionship derives from grotesquerie. This same empowerment can be seen in another grotesquerie: Saleem Sinai’s impotence. Stephane Tyssens has noted the “extreme kind of emancipation” that *Midnight’s Children* demands from its readers because its narrator is not a seducer, but rather allows the novel to unfold before their eyes.<sup>70</sup>

Revaluation based on disjunction and disruption is not only relevant thematically in *Midnight’s Children*, but is integral to the structuration of the work. Two further passages from *Midnight’s Children* exemplify the construction and transformation of meaning in the text. Early in the novel we hear how Nadir Khan shared a room with a painter

whose paintings had grown larger and larger as he tried to get the whole of life into his art. “Look at me,” he said before he killed himself, “I wanted to be a miniaturist and I’ve got elephantiasis instead.”<sup>71</sup>

Later, Saleem remarks:

(I am suddenly reminded of Nadir Khan’s friend the painter: is this an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality? Worse: am I infected, too?<sup>72</sup>

A third passage that is relevant comes from *Tristram Shandy*, and could just as easily describe Rushdie’s work as Sterne’s:

the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, — and at the same time.<sup>73</sup>

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69 Arnold, John. “Poe’s “Lionizing”: The Wound and the Bawdry”. *Literature and Psychology*. 1967 XVII:7 52–54, p. 53

70 Tyssens, Stephane. “*Midnight’s Children* or the Ambiguity of Impotence”. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, Autumn 1989 12:1 19–31, p. 30

71 Tyssens, “*Midnight’s Children*, or the Ambiguity of Impotence”, p. 48

72 Tyssens, “*Midnight’s Children*, or the Ambiguity of Impotence”, p. 75

73 Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, p. 58

Structurally speaking, the problem of the anatomist, unable to bear the immense pressure to include or “encapsulate the whole of reality” that is presented to the anatomizing consciousness, is contrasted with the historicist, committed to the linearity of narrative. Saleem Sinai and Tristram Shandy have much in common as narrators. To a large extent they are both tied to the historical events which form the narrative basis of their story — in Rushdie’s case, Indian history, with all of the chronological inconsistencies to which Saleem continually points, such as Gandhi’s assassination and the death of Nehru, and in the case of *Tristram Shandy* a chronology which is in large part constructed through the externally verifiable details of William III’s campaigns, in which uncle Toby fought. This forms one part of the “machinery” to which Tristram refers. The other part is the digressive, the rhinological, the carnivalesque displaced, the sexual, the rumbustious, which is continually threatening not only to disrupt the historical (in that it continually refuses linearity of progress, as Tristram’s squiggly plot diagrams show) but also to replace the historical sense of time with a more fundamental concept of time: replacing the epic time of history with the “adventure-everyday time”, a chronotope that resists linearity and allows the freedom of grotesque revaluation, recombination and satirical confrontation.<sup>74</sup>

There is, therefore, a tension between the concept of history as it is understood outside the confines of the co-ordinating consciousness in *Midnight’s Children*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, history as a sequence of events which evolves through a series of grotesque vignettes, the nature of which continually militates against the linear certainties of “history”.

Grotesque displacement, however, creates or reveals a certain emptiness. After Aadam Aziz, punched in the nose by a tussock of earth, resolves to bow down to no religion, no man, there is a consequent hole in the middle of his soul. The displacement of religion by a grotesque form of history has its parallel in the comic displacement of the penis by the nose. The directions in which these displacements occur are contrary but complementary. The verticality of the movement suggests the tripartite menippean universe of a destructive/regenerative hell, an everyday-time/carnival earth and a utopic/apocalyptic heaven. It also emphasises the gap that exists between that which is displaced and that which displaces. The same point can be made with the narrator, Saleem Sinai. Having been emasculated by the Widow’s (Indira Gandhi’s) forced sterilization program, he is left with nothing but preserving pickles and memories. The

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74 Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 111-28

topos of symbolically or actually emasculated narrator is fused with the comic figure of the grotesquely benosed, with the narrator being transformed into a carnivalesque author figure. This is achieved through a series of displacements, from nose to penis to pen, each transformation characterised by an emptiness that corresponds to the disruption of the carnival itself. Saleem opens Chapter Three thus:

Please believe that I am falling apart.

I am not speaking metaphorically; nor is this the opening gambit of some melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity. I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug — that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration.<sup>75</sup>

Disintegration of the self is a satirical strategy that derives from the grotesque principle of displacement. Aadam Aziz's stethoscope is interpreted by Tai, the filthy, cynic boatman as a thing like an elephant's trunk, as he says to Dr. Aziz with scorn, "You will use such a machine now, instead of your own big nose."<sup>76</sup> Here, the machine imitates the grotesque and seeks to replace it. In the act of replacing it is indebted to what it imitates, but also, as Tai observes, it can never really replace. If Burton's *Anatomy* represents the idea of anatomy as an inclusive, synthetic knowledge, it is in an antagonistic relation with Gray's *Anatomy*, which represents the idea of anatomy as exclusive, empirical knowledge. Aadam's Ganesh-like protuberance is also displaced into the stethoscope, recalling Nietzsche's critique of Western philosophy through the comparison of the nose with the spectroscope. Once this displacement occurs, a gap between eastern and western medicine, eastern religion and western cultural institutions, begins to open up.

The tight structure of *Midnight's Children* therefore enables a vast complex of metaphors to aggregate around consistent points of 'disappearance' — nodal points where meaning undergoes exchange and transference from one node to the other, with the result that meaning is produced at the expense of an emptiness lying between these nodes of exchange. Thus, in the case of *Midnight's Children*, comic displacement anchored in the grotesque becomes a process which opens up the despair familiar to nearly all works of menippean satire: an indictment of the present in terms of the

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75 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 37

76 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 21

traditional, with a refusal to make this indictment normative. Instead an almost obsessive emphasis is placed on the politically, or at least potentially, anarchic.

There is also the sense in which this emptiness is a kind of loquacious silence. The garrulousness of *Midnight's Children* appears strangely silent when viewed against the plethora of grotesque transformations that constitute the work. With this silence, the relentless menippean questioning of truth has its most profound expression. This recalls Beckett's dictum:

there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express<sup>77</sup>

This is not the nihilistic manifesto it is usually taken to be but rather an admission of the silence upon which all texts must ultimately depend. It is the reader who must construct and make sense, and it is the menippea in particular that insists upon the freedom of the mind to the extent that the arbitrariness of language, where words mean what they mean, is exposed as a threatening silence itself. In this context the element of chance is invoked as a principle which stands in opposition to the certainty, or weight, of history. When Saleem remarks near the end of *Midnight's Children*, referring to the grotesque transformations of the work, that "they happened that way because that's how it happened"<sup>78</sup> he is acknowledging that an important aspect of the grotesque is the element of chance, the fortuitous combination or the accidental, illuminating occurrence.

The "hole" which is consistently threatening to overtake figures, narrative, narrator and characters in *Midnight's Children* is also the "hole" of a grotesque anarchy. This has implications for the reading of comic displacements in carnivalesque fiction. The act of displacement opens up the process of exchange and emphasises the void that exists between nodes of exchange, the same void that is implied in the tension between history and anatomy. Kayser has noted that the grotesque relies for its effect on suddenness and surprise.<sup>79</sup> In this manner it is like a mini-sublime, a fluid moment that alters and disappears as the narrative continues. The suddenness of each grotesque transformation, while itself a sublime and surprising discovery, is illuminated against a textual background which takes on the appearance of a loquacious silence.

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77 Beckett, Samuel. *Disjecta*. New York: Grove, 1984, p. 139

78 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 461

79 Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 184. "Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque."

# 3

## Grotesque Association in Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and Thomas Love Peacock's *Gryll Grange*: Utterance, Surdity and the Ruminant Stomach

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MENENIUS

There was a time when all the body's members  
Rebelle against the belly, thus accused it:  
That only like a gulf it did remain  
I' th' midst o' th' body, idle and unactive,  
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing  
Like labour with the rest, where th' other instruments  
Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,  
And, mutually participate, did minister  
Unto the appetite and affection common  
Of the whole body...

— *Coriolanus*, I i ll.94-103

Murphy was too familiar with this attitude of derision tinged with loathing to make the further blunder of trying to abate it. Sometimes it was expressed more urbanely, sometimes less. Its forms were as various as the grades of the Chandler mentality, its content was one: 'Thou surd!'

— SAMUEL BECKETT, *Murphy*, p.47

Jute.— Yutah!  
Mutt.— Mukk's pleasurad.  
Jute.— Are you jeff?  
Mutt.— Somehards.  
Jute.— But you are not jeffmute?  
Mutt.— Noho. Only an utterer.  
Jute.— Whoa? Whoat is the mutter with you?  
Mutt.— I became a stun a stummer.  
Jute.— What a hauhauhauhaudibble thing, to be cause! How, Mutt?  
Mutt.— Aput the buttle, surd.  
Jute.— Whose poddle? Wherein?

— JAMES JOYCE, *Finnegans Wake*, p.16

### 1. A Genealogy of Symposiastic Literature

The symposium, or *cena*, refers to a literary tradition that encompasses two different genres, although confidently discriminating between the two may prove an elusive task. On the one hand there is the academic symposium, of which the modern scientific symposium, as a literary form (and a form of convention or conference) is

the heir. This was usually in the form of a banquet dialogue and was already in existence during the epoch of the Socratic dialogue, examples of it being in Plato and Xenophon. The academic symposium, along with other genres such as the epistle and the dialogue, was among the established genres of philosophic discourse. Generally, it allowed for various dialogues to be brought to bear upon certain issues.

On the other hand there is the symposium understood, according to Bakhtin, as a “carnivalised” genre. As a directly carnivalized genre it has

special privileges (originally of a cultic sort): the right to a certain license, ease and familiarity, to a certain frankness, to eccentricity, ambivalence; that is, the combination in one discourse of praise and abuse, of the serious and the comic.<sup>1</sup>

For Bakhtin, the symposium is by nature a “purely carnivalistic genre”. For some critics, the symposium as it relates to menippean satire is supposed to have had its origins as a mocking of the academic symposium. Kirk writes of Menippus that he “chose to parody the established genres of philosophic discourse — the dialogue, symposium, epistle, treatise, testament, and cosmography — by exaggerating their fictions and arguments, pushing their logic to an absurd extreme...”<sup>2</sup> Blanchard notes that at least one of Menippus’ works was a mock symposium and it would appear that the mock symposium, along with the mock encomium, was one of the earlier conduits of the menippea.<sup>3</sup> This kind of symposium can be differentiated from the academic symposium by the term symposiastic or deipnosophistic literature. Examples of this include the *Cena Trimalchionis* of Petronius, the *Cena Cypriani* and the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus. Relihan also notes the popularity of parodies of the Platonic symposium in Menippus, Varro, Julian and even Martianus.<sup>4</sup> Symposiastic literature of this kind is a kindred genre of the menippea and is more often than not absorbed into the menippea.

However, the distinction between symposiastic literature and the academic symposium is not ultimately sustainable. Plato’s *Symposium* holds a particular fascination for thinkers as diverse as Bakhtin and Nietzsche, given that it provides the basis for the dialogue as an unfinalisable form, and the symposium as the form which allows for

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1 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 120

2 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. xiv

3 Blanchard, *Scholar’s Bedlam*, p. 15.

4 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 26.

multiplicity of points of view. Edgar Wind, has noted that “the curious remarks reported at the very end of the dialogue, where a discussion of whether or not a tragic poet might also compose comedies had begun, self-reflexively point back [sic.] to the *Symposium* itself as a seriocomic work.”<sup>5</sup> There are, however, generic affinities with the menippea in the *Symposium* apart from this. The multiplicity of voices ensures a somewhat disjunctive form, even if it lacks the radical heterogeneity of the menippea. The subject matter, love, allows for an eroticism that is also present in other, more menippean socratic dialogues such as the *Phaedrus*. Festive raillery and rumbustiousness are as much a part of symposiastic literature as the menippea, and it is no small matter that Frye notes Plato has had a strong influence on the type of the menippean *cena*.<sup>6</sup>

The relation of differing concepts of the symposium to symposiastic literature in general is made clear in a reading of Aristophanes’ speech in *The Symposium*.<sup>7</sup> In what is generally taken to be a flippant speech, Aristophanes speaks of a mythic past when the human body was doubled in three different sexes of male/male, female/female and male/female. As a result of displeasing the gods a split or sundering occurred, resulting in the form of the human body as it is today. As a result, desire (meaning, in its Greek root, ‘a lack’) is the process of seeking out one’s lost half. However, the union of the two, when it occurs, is not unitary: instead it is binary and irreconcilably so, with a notion of unitariness only possible with reference to a mythic origin.<sup>8</sup> This speech stands in a synecdochic relation to the symposium. The unitary theme which unites (a carnivalesque ingestion) also resists unitariness (carnivalesque meiosis). The symposium can also be seen as metaphoric of the menippea as a genre. Derrida’s notion of “the law of the law of genre” is illustrative of this:

In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging — a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set.<sup>9</sup>

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5 Edgar Wind, as cited in Blanchard, *Scholar’s Bedlam*, p. 67.

6 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 310.

7 Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Walter Hamilton Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951, pp. 58-65

8 In a different sense, the parodic element of most symposia is also relevant here. Whether the symposium itself is parodic, or contains parodic dialogue, it is clear (at least to me if no-one else) that an origin, in a temporal sense, to that parody cannot be located, as it is the eternal stomach which is the source of the banquet license to frivolity. The supposed simultaneity, in a temporal sense, of *The Iliad* and *The Margites* is also demonstrative of this.

9 Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” in *Acts of Literature*, p. 227

Symposiasts take part in the symposium without belonging: they are united in a common activity, yet they necessarily remain distinct, so that they do not belong to a set at all, other than the shared activity of eating, drinking, and voicing different utterances. This is metaphorical of the “law of the law of genre”, to paraphrase Derrida, of which menippean satire is a salient example. Works of menippean satire are united in a shared disunity in an obviously marked way, but this is indicative of other genres as well. The analogy of different menippea being like so many symposiasts quibbling at a table is a useful image, but an image only, to visualising the genre.<sup>10</sup>

Symposiastic literature, therefore, has a long history beginning with Plato and extending into the present, with the extended chutney motif of *Midnight's Children* being one salient example. Frye notes that the symposium has

an unbroken tradition down through those urbane and leisurely conversations which define the ideal courtier in Castiglione or the doctrine and discipline of angling in Walton. A modern development produces the country-house weekends in Peacock, Huxley, and their imitators in which the opinions and ideas and cultural interests expressed are as important as the love-making.<sup>11</sup>

In each period symposiastic literature fuses with the menippea in different degrees and to different ends. In antiquity the menippea and the symposium were often one and the same. Towards the end of the sixteenth century there was a “revival of the Menippean symposium as a forum for encyclopedic, digressive display.”<sup>12</sup> The symposium endures as a form of the academic (scientific) community in which ideas, theses and proposals are officially discussed. In these symposia we find a gesture towards the generic model which allows a freedom of dialogic inquiry, a model to which the modern-day academic symposium alludes without, perhaps, achieving the same degree of latitude that the grotesque symposiastic genre affords.

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10 Highet has written that “the name ‘satire’ comes from the Latin word *satura*, which means primarily ‘full’, and then comes to mean ‘a mixture full of different things.’ It seems to have been a part of the vocabulary of food. We have the recipe of a sort of salad called *satura*; a dish full of mixed first-fruits offered to the gods was called *lanx satura*; and Juvenal, no doubt in allusion to this strain of meaning, calls his satires by the name of another mixed food, *farrago*, a mishmash of grain given to cattle. Other types of literature have been given food-names: ‘farce’ means ‘stuffing’, ‘macaronic’ poetry was a crude mixture of Latin and Italian, and so forth. The essence of the original name therefore was variety — plus a certain down-to-earth naturalness, or coarseness, or unsophisticated heartiness.” Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, p. 231

11 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 310-11.

12 Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p. xviii

Yet this gesture towards the symposium on the part of academia is also a gesture towards the politics of inclusiveness. A characteristic of all symposiastic literature is that participants are united by their common activity, that of eating, drinking and sitting in the same room or at the same table. This basic communitarian model has resonances beyond the serio-comic, accommodating, as Frye has remarked, certain Christian ideas:

It is clear from the opening of the *Laws* that the symposium had something of the same [as the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation] communion symbolism for Plato. It would be hard to find a simpler or more vivid image of human civilization, where man attempts to surround nature and put it inside his (social) body, than the sacramental meal.<sup>13</sup>

For Frye, the symposium is at the extreme limit of social comedy, envisioning society after its own form of dialectic festivity, a controlling force that holds society together.<sup>14</sup>

The inclusiveness of the symposium also contains within it a certain logic of power. Nancy writes of Plato's *Symposium* that "for all its generosity, the *Symposium* also exercises a mastery over love."<sup>15</sup> In other words, while discussion and points of view are shared, the various points of view are also subordinated to the principle of sharing. This can lead to images of generosity or magnanimity in the manner that Ishmael notes in *Moby Dick*: "Who has but once dined his friends, has tasted what it is to be Caesar."<sup>16</sup> The power of inclusiveness is predicated upon the power to generate excess, much like the lavishness of Trimalchio or Empedocles of Agrigentum in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*.<sup>17</sup> Usually, however, the inclusiveness of the symposium is of a benign nature.

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13 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 143.

14 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 286.

15 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Ed Peter Connor. Trans. Peter Connor et. al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 85

16 Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Ed Harrison Hayford et al. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1992, p. 162

17 Athenaeus. *The Deipnosophists*. Vol.1 [7 Vols.] Trans. Charles Burton Garlick. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 13 Empedocles of Agrigentum was one of the victors at Olympus. Given that he was a Pythagorean, he could not permit the eating of meat at his victory banquet. Instead he treated his guests to an ox made entirely from myrrh, a lavishness that almost defies comprehension.

There is, however, also the sense in which the symposium is an expanded dialogue, and is thus somewhat antagonistic to the inclusive vision of symposium as communion. As much as the participants of the symposium are united in their common activity, they are at odds with each other by virtue of that commonality: they must speak over each other, differ, quibble, argue or, perhaps more potently, remain silent. Whereas the inclusive aspect of the symposium can be seen to be analogous to the absence of footlights in carnival<sup>18</sup> the fractious or violent aspect of the symposium can be seen to be analogous to Dionysian dismemberment, or the more violent aspects of carnival itself.<sup>19</sup>

The continuation of dialogue in the symposium depends on interruption and, to a certain extent dissonance. This aspect of the utterance is something which Bakhtin comments on in "Discourse in the Novel":

The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background.<sup>20</sup>

These metaphors of warfare in relation to the utterance point to the struggle involved in gaining a voice and in the strategic positioning of the utterance. There is also a related sense in which the utterance is engaged in a struggle not so much with other utterances, but with a hubbub, or noise, the sense of which is no longer entirely within the linguistic realm.

Common to each tendency in symposiastic literature — that towards inclusiveness and that towards violence — is the looming, ruminative presence of the stomach. While the stomach, as noted above, is part of the inclusive movement of the symposium, it is also that which interrupts, if only to interrupt utterances in order to continue the eating and drinking that unites the deipnosophists. Figurations of the stomach characterise the more grotesque aspects of the symposium, which will be explored in further depth below in relation to Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and Thomas Love Peacock's *Gryll Grange*. In each, the stomach figures prominently and cannot be entirely dissociated from the revaluation of truths that comes from symposiastic dialogue and raillery. This is particularly evident in the menippea of Peacock and the contrast that can be drawn with De Quincey underscores this point.

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18 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 122.

19 See Bernstein, *Bitter Carnival*.

20 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 282.

The connection between stomach and thought, or the evaluation of truths has a long history. Despite truncated metaphors for thought such as 'digestion' and 'rumination', the stomach more often than not resides in an antagonistic relation to 'rational' thought. A spectacular example of this in recent comic literature occurs in Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. At a reading where his poetry has already caused members of his audience to die by spontaneous haemorrhage or to gnaw their own limbs off, Poet Master Grunthos the Flatulent

was about to embark on a reading of his 12 book epic entitled *My Favourite Bathtime Gurgles*, when his own major intestine, in a desperate attempt to save life and civilization, leapt straight up through his neck and throttled his brain.<sup>21</sup>

There is also a sense in which association, or digression, figures in relation to the stomach. One of John Dunton's menippea, *A Voyage Round the World*, features a hero who "meets with catastrophe... an accident caused by his nurse lodges his brains in his stomach, and he afterwards 'writes his guts out' in the wayward style he calls 'Rambling,' or wandering from one topic to the next."<sup>22</sup> Again, excessive thought (as much as digressive, or excessively associational thought) is linked with the stomach in the menippean tradition, much as Ishmael narrates in *Moby Dick*: "So soon as I hear that such or such a man gives himself out for a philosopher, I conclude that, like the dyspeptic old woman, he must have 'broken his digester.'"<sup>23</sup>

The stomach therefore figures in the menippea more often than not as something which is antithetical to rational thought. In discussing the 'fundamental will of the spirit' and its feeling of growth, Nietzsche talks about an

apparently antithetical drive of the spirit, a sudden decision for ignorance, for arbitrary shutting-out, a closing of the windows, an inner denial of this or that thing, a refusal to let it approach, a kind of defensive posture against much that can be known, a contentment with the dark, with the closed horizon, an acceptance and approval of ignorance: all this being necessary according to the degree of its power to appropriate, its 'digestive

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21 Adams, Douglas. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. London: Pan, 1982, p. 53

22 Korkowski [Kirk], "Tristram Shandy, Digression, and the Menippean Tradition." *Scholia Satyrica*, p. 12

23 Melville, *Moby Dick*, p. 56

power,' to speak in a metaphor — and indeed 'the spirit' is more like a stomach than anything else.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, swallowing, or “digestive power” is transgredient to thought and to the stomach.<sup>25</sup> This transgredience, or stepping over, is the source of a certain tension in the utterance and the verbal artefact that is analogous to Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism.<sup>26</sup> The body leaves its trace on the utterance in as much as attitude, intonation, and the like are extra-verbal aspects of the utterance which are as much a part of its meaning as the words themselves.

There are, however, aspects of the body which are decidedly non-linguistic, and it is their relation to the linguistic that is of concern in this chapter. An example which illustrates this is Aulus Gellius’ quotation from *Varro’s Menippeans* which includes a synopsis of *Nescis Quid Vesper Serus Vehat* (“You Know Not What Late Evening May Bring”). Gellius’ paraphrase states that “Guests should neither be garrulous (*loquaces*) nor dumb (*mutos*)... *eloquentia* belongs in the forum and *silentium* in the bedroom.”<sup>27</sup> Relihan finds in this paraphrase the kind of deliberate fatuity common to many menippean narrators:

This qualification not only expresses the curious notion that proper conversation is a mean between silence and oratory, but equates the normally positive *eloquentia* and the normally negative *loquaces*.<sup>28</sup>

He contends that this belittling of eloquence is self-parodic, given the attention to rhetoric in balanced descriptions. It is true that this academic distinction may appear inappropriate in the context of the symposium, but there is, nevertheless, a logic at work here, which is the logic of the symposium. Loquacity belongs to the public realm, silence to the private, even sexual realm. In the symposium, the private and the public commingle and cannot be fully differentiated, hence the strangeness, for

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24 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, pp. 141-42.

25 Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Art and Answerability*. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Ed Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p. 233n. “Transgredient (from L. *transgredi*, *transgressus*, step across, step over): Jonas Cohn and Wilhelm Windelband use ‘transgredient’ as the opposite of ‘immanent’— it is used in preference to transcendent, as it is within the limits of possible experience, as opposed to Kantian ‘transcendence’.

26 Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, pp. 43-63; Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, passim; *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W, McGee. Ed Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994, pp. 92-112; *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, passim.

27 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 56

28 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 56

Relihan at least, of the notion of proper conversation as a mean between silence and oratory, loquacity and garrulousness.

## 2. Surdity and Utterance

The symbolism of the symposium is also an important aspect of its literary significance. The Christian communion offers a basic understanding of the world, in terms of incorporation and transcendence, as does its grotesque mirror, the feast. Apart from the symbolism particular to each, the symposium is a potent symbol in itself that offers a way of enhancing understanding of literature. In Carlyle's menippean satire, *Sartor Resartus*, he has his hero, Professor Teufelsdröckh proclaim

In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here therefore, by Silence and Speech acting together, comes a double significance. And if both the Speech be itself high, as the Silence fit and noble, how expressive will their union be!<sup>29</sup>

The symposium is a particularly resonant exemplar of this semiotic proposition: it is predicated upon the plurality of utterances brought to bear upon a multiplicity of points of view. But these utterances also take place in the equally important context of a form of silence: be it that of drinking, eating, hullabaloo (a silence by virtue of indistinctness) or the assent of other participants to whichever voice is momentarily privileged. This chapter will therefore seek to undertake an extended exploration of the linguistic symbol, in the context of silence and speech acting together. It will also be argued that the kind of associational, aggregative structures that comprise most menippea are typical of a kind of semiotic practice in which neither silence nor speech is privileged over the other, but where the associational nature of this signifying practice makes possible the exploration of the body not so much as a represented image but as a pervasive, signifying presence.

## 3. The Stomach and Grotesque Association

In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* De Quincey outlines what he hopes will prove "not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and instructive".<sup>30</sup> The title of the work suggests that it is a confession. In this case it is

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29 Carlyle, Thomas. *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*. London: Dent, 1975, p. 165

30 De Quincey, Thomas. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p. 29

the confession of a drug addict in which there is the suggestion of a state of mute stupefaction provoked to self-justificatory utterance. But De Quincey also “boasteth himself to be a philosopher”<sup>31</sup> He is therefore tied to twin aims: on the one hand the confession as such, in which the irrational silence that pervades the opium addict’s stupor is provoked to utterance; and on the other hand, an empirical, philosophical discourse in which an attempt to impart value (in a commodified sense) to the phenomenology of opium addiction.

The confessional aspects of the work would appear to be at odds with the more “philosophical” aspects. As much as the phenomenology of opium addiction is the grounds upon which his philosophizing takes place, it can equally be argued that the occasion of philosophizing is continually undermined, or devoured from within, by a gesturing towards the mysterious irrationality of the opium stupor.

However, at the nexus of these contrary, yet proportional aspects of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* is the figure of the irritable stomach. In the narrative (as opposed to an externally verifiable chronology), De Quincey’s first mention of opium use is as a palliative to a stomach ailment:

In the twenty-eighth year of my age, a most painful affection of the stomach, which I had first experienced ten years before, *attacked me in great strength*. This affection had originally been caused by extremities of hunger, suffered in my boyish days. During the season of hope and redundant happiness which succeeded (that is, from eighteen to twenty-four) it had slumbered: for the three following years it had revived at intervals: and now, under unfavourable circumstances, from depression of spirits, it *attacked me with a violence* that yielded to no remedies but opium. As the youthful sufferings which first produced this *derangement* of the stomach, were interesting in themselves, and in the circumstances that attended them, I shall here briefly retrace them.<sup>32</sup> [italics mine]

The rumbling stomach which is the cause of his usage of opium is also the basis for the confessional structure to the work: access to the past, his youth, is through the stomach. The derangement of the stomach is also a derangement of sensibility, and can only be assuaged by a further derangement, that afforded by the eating of opium. It is therefore a derangement which potentially acts as a *pharmakon* within his own

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31 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 33

32 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 35

body, that is, as both a poison and a 'cure'<sup>33</sup> of his ailment and as a site of an initial derangement and a further derangement which he hopes will result in normalcy.

The stomach in this instance threatens to overtake and ultimately become the philosopher with the result that silence would be all of which he would be capable. But the metaphors of violence and of warfare imply a struggle that goes beyond mere 'derangement'. The question to be asked is, if 'my' stomach is attacking 'me', then what is the nature of the 'me' that is being attacked, and what is the nature of this figure of the stomach? It would appear that the structure of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* is predicated on an unresolvable struggle between a part of self that utters and another part of self which is defiantly, if not imperatively silent, betraying itself only in signs. In this sense the 'me' of the text is the operant voice, the continually uttering voice that is tempted to silence by that which has no utterance.

This conflict is a non-dialectical, dialogic struggle or tension. There are similarities here between this tension and the word *tenson* which derives, as Peacock defines it, from "the twelfth century, when two or three masters of the *Gai Saber* discussed questions of love and chivalry."<sup>34</sup> The emphasis of *tenson* for Peacock is on the non-dialectical evaluation of truth, a point particularly emphasised by the possible inclusion of a third party to the discussion. In *Gryll Grange*, however, the *tenson* functions as the basis for the advancement of the plot (which is the production of an Aristophanic comedy) and characterises the continual debate between what is uttered (e.g. the name Palestine Soup) and what is not uttered (the word-associational etymology that Dr. Opimian offers for the name).

As it is defined and used by Peacock the term *tenson* is a precursor of Bakhtin's dialogism. It is also particularly appropriate given the context from which it derives. The *Gai Saber* of which Peacock writes is the *Gay Science* made famous by Nietzsche's book of the same name. In his introduction, Walter Kaufmann writes of "gay science, philosophy that sings and sizzles" practised by a "philosopher who also is an artist."<sup>35</sup> The connections between gay science and the menippea (as well as the comic mode in general) are manifold. Nietzsche writes:

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33 Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 95-116.

34 Peacock, Thomas Love. *Headlong Hall and Gryll Grange*. Ed. Michael Barron and Michael Slater. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 101.

35 Kaufmann, Translator's Introduction to *The Gay Science* p. 13

To laugh at oneself as one would have to laugh in order to laugh out of the whole truth ... Perhaps laughter will then have formed an alliance with wisdom, perhaps only 'gay science' will then be left.<sup>36</sup>

Elsewhere he also writes of the gay science as

the saturnalia of a spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure — patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope — and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health, and the *intoxication* of convalescence... This whole book is nothing but a bit of merry-making after long privation and powerlessness."<sup>37</sup>

Formally, Nietzsche's work is a menippean satire, and the concerns that inform much of his work belong to the menippea in general. The emphasis on the laughter and the emphasis on the body mean that the *tenson* embodies the saturnalian aspect of the incommensurability between the linguistic and the body when the two become transgredient to each other, particularly in a symposiastic context. When Nietzsche cautions that

We philosophers are not free to divide body from soul as the people do; we are even less free to divide soul from spirit<sup>38</sup>

it becomes apparent that any *tenson* or dialogical relation that is peculiar to the menippea also involves a dimension that is extralinguistic. That is, the festive body cannot be separated from the symposiastic dialogue. In De Quincey's case, this extralinguistic dialogism is unresolvable: hence the apparent impossibility of 'utter' silence.

What, then, is the nature of the figure of the stomach? To quote a refrain from Book IV Chapter 57 of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, it is an abstract principle which insists on the "truth" of "all for the sake of the belly". Messer Gaster is the inventor and creator of all mankind's technology — he is, as Bakhtin notes, "the incarnation of the material needs of the organized human collectivity,"<sup>39</sup> a necessary principle which engenders both the positive aspects of collective humanity — organised food, cities, useful machines — and the negative aspects — private gluttony, greed, covetousness and war. But on a more abstract level, Gaster's world is a silent one:

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36 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 74

37 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 32

38 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 35

39 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 300

for he is impious and strict, blunt and stern, difficult and inflexible. One can convince him of nothing. One can neither remonstrate with him nor persuade him of anything. He does not hear a word. In the same way as the Egyptians said that Harpocras,<sup>40</sup> the god of silence — called Sigalion in Greek — is *astomous* — that is to say mouthless — so Gaster was created without ears. He only speaks by signs. But these signs all the world obeys, more promptly than the Praetors' edicts or royal commands. When he calls, he will not admit the slightest stay or delay. You say that when the lion roars, all beasts round about shiver, for as far — that is to say — as his voice carries. That is written, and it is true. I have seen the evidence. But I guarantee that at Messer Gaster's command the whole sky trembles, the whole earth shakes. The words of his command are — Make up your mind to obey immediately, or die.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the pervasive silence, Gaster is obviously capable of communication on a universal scale, even if his commands can only be *translated* into the final imperative that Rabelais relates.

Gaster stands at the nexus of a struggle between universal utterance and a signifying, if not rational, silence. The tension, or struggle between these two aspects of communication presents a useful way of incorporating into any theory of meaning that which is extraverbal, non linguistic, silent or irrational. In an example which he uses to discuss the nature of the utterance and distinguish between meaning, theme and sense, Vološinov demonstrates how the extraverbal interacts with the verbal:

Two people are sitting in a room. They are both silent. Then one of them says, "Well!" The other does not respond.

For us, as outsiders, this entire "conversation" is utterly incomprehensible. Taken in isolation, the utterance "Well!" is empty and unintelligible. Nevertheless, this peculiar colloquy of two persons, consisting of only one — although to be sure, one expressively intoned — word, does make perfect sense, is fully meaningful and complete.<sup>42</sup>

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40 This offers an interesting slant to the origin of Harpo Marx's name: that it is not only an obvious nickname derived from his harp playing, but also refers to his silence. It is an interesting notion that silent irrationality is frequently coupled with garrulous censure (as in Harpo [Harpocras] with Groucho [Momus]) in comedy and pantomime. Silence vies with utterance for the supreme comic truth, crowned with a wreath of laughter. For a good example of how this comic coupling of silence vs. garrulity works, see *2 Henry IV* III ii. Shallow is prone to repetition, yet Silence, obviously enough, says nothing. Yet a good director would be able to utilize Silence as a kind of slapstick/vaudevillian character, and the coupling of the two would seem to be illustrative of this dyadic relation between utterance and surdity.

41 Rabelais, François. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Trans. J. M. Cohen Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, p. 571

42 Vološinov, V.N. *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*. Trans. I. R. Titunik. Ed I.R. Titunik and Neal H. Bruss. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, p. 99. Although it has been established

As it turns out, the two interlocutors are sitting in a room; it has just started to snow outside and it is late winter, meaning that an already protracted winter will continue for the foreseeable future. The intonation, the shared purview of the interlocutors and the interlocutors' common knowledge and understanding of the situation and their common evaluation of the situation are all part of what Vološinov calls the "extraverbal context" of the utterance. For Vološinov the relation between the said and the unsaid is one where discourse resolves the situation, but the utterance depends on "their real, material appurtenance to one and the same segment of being."<sup>43</sup> Volosinov is aware of the heterogeneous nature of the elements that comprise communication and interaction at any given time, but the tenor of his argument tends toward the ways in which the heterogeneous appurtenances of an utterance contribute toward its meaning. There is a sense, however, in which the relation between the utterance and its extraverbal content is agonistic.

If we were to re-imagine the situation Vološinov uses to illustrate his argument so that instead of one of the interlocutors saying pointedly "Well!" he were to fart rather loudly, the interrelated notions of silence, the irrational and meaning come into play in a slightly more revealing way. Silence can be as meaningful as an utterance, even though silence can be seen to be the backdrop against which the utterance is draped. Bataille writes that

Profound communication demands silence. In the end, action, which predication signifies, is limited to this: closing one's door in order to stop discourse (the noise the mechanics of the outside).

The door must remain open and shut at the same time.<sup>44</sup>

There must therefore be a will to utterance as well as a will to silence in order for there to be communication. But the will to silence can be evident as a loquacious silence, so much talk which effectively says nothing, or like the instance of the fart above, it can be an utterance which is non-verbal, non-rational, yet despite its comic and gratuitous nature, meaningful. It is therefore possible to establish in a general theory of meaning an agonistic relation between the will to utterance and the will to silence. The will to utterance can be characterised in its own terms: an 'utter' drive to utterance, to fill up

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that Bakhtin wrote most of, if not all of the Vološinov and Medvedev books, I refer to the author as 'Vološinov' here and elsewhere for the sake of consistency with the published books' ascribed authorship.

43 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 100

44 Bataille, Georges. *Inner Experience*. Trans. Leslie-Anne Boldt. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 92

all the space presented to it by silence and to vanquish it utterly. If one were to pursue it to its extremity, 'utter' utterance becomes a kind of silence. In babble and the garrulity that becomes nonsensical another kind of silence emerges — one that is still meaningful, to be sure, but one also that is non-rational. Perhaps the best example of this is *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's impossible menippea that is polysemous to the point of gibberish. At the extremity of a textual utterance of this kind, the will to silence reasserts itself, even if that silence is merely the utter profusion of 'noise' that drowns out any simple utterance that could be understood against and with its extraverbal context.

We can call this 'will to silence' surdity, meaning in its Latin root deaf and indistinct; it also has the meaning of irrationality.<sup>45</sup> The best description of the surd comes from George Steiner:

Today, we stand orphaned but free in the place of the *a-Logos*. The Greek word becomes Latin *surdus*. In English, a *surd* is an algebraic root which cannot be expressed in finite terms. It lies outside the commensurable and the decidable. Etymologically, 'surd' carries the earlier meaning 'voiceless'. At that point, it shades into the unspoken and the mute, into the opaque zone of 'surdity', which means 'deafness' and 'absurdity'. Each of these areas of definition and of connotation is pertinent. The deconstructions which I have summarized are those that challenge both intelligibility and vocation (the answering act). Play and silence draw near to each other.<sup>46</sup>

The surdic realm extends beyond the realm of the utterance and includes silence, the extraverbal aspects of the utterance, the nonsensical and the irrational. It can also, as the example of the fart above suggests, extend into the realm of the utterance. The fart above can be considered to be an utterance, whether it is an unwitting confession, an insult, a sarcastic comment on one's company or a simple joke: but it is also radically surdic, an utterance which 'says' nothing, a voiceless consonant, as in the surd of phonetics. The example of the fart is perhaps an extreme way of introducing the notion of the agonistic relation between surdity and utterance. It is clear that they are co-present in the above instance: but any attempt to evaluate the meaning of the scene would involve an interpretive flux between the two realms. For as much as the fart is a

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45 For the suggestion of this notion I am indebted to Bill Dunbar's initial formulation of this idea in his unpublished paper "The Coriolanian: Aphonic Erethism, Utterance, Demotic Surdity."

46 Steiner, George. *Real Presences: Is there Anything in What We Say?* London: Faber, 1989, p. 127

surdic exclamation, it is also an utterance that overturns and ruptures the surdic 'will to silence' that pervaded the room before its diffuse arrival.<sup>47</sup>

This struggle between utterance and surdity is a characteristic of the generation of meaning as much as play is the condition of meaning. While any linguistics must take into account the surdic aspects of meaning, in that the extraverbal context of any utterance enters into the meaning of that utterance, it is equally important to examine the tension that exists between an utterance and its extraverbal context and, in terms of the above analysis, the tension between utterance and surdity.

The key to understanding the figure of the stomach in De Quincey and, more importantly, in Peacock, is the notion of the perpetual flux between surdity and utterance. Each struggles to cancel and elide the other, yet the defeat of each leads to the victory of each in a never-ending dialectic. Total silence begs for the disruption of sound, while cacophony tends toward the relief of silence, or deafness. In this context the surdity of silence is a necessity that is more potent than the rationality of utterance: the lion roars, but its sound dissipates, whereas Messer Gaster commands, and his soundless imperative is understood universally. A similar exploration of this struggle can be found in Kierkegaard's symposium, "In Vino Veritas," a recollection related by William Afham, one of Kierkegaard's many personae:

Indeed, what is as intoxicating as stillness! For no matter how quickly the drunkard raises the glass to his lips, his intoxication does not increase as quickly as the intoxication created by stillness, which increases with every second! And what is the intoxicating content of the glass but a drop compared with the infinite sea of silence from which I drink? And what is all the seething of the wine but a fleeting illusion compared with the spontaneous bubbling of silence, which seethes more and more vigorously! But then, too, what vanishes as quickly as this reveling — once there is speaking!<sup>48</sup>

The fragility in this example of both utterance and surdity at their extremity is evident: what can be more delicate than utter silence? And is not utterance at its limit a seething

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47 An interesting example of this is 'Le Petomane', the comic artist who was the pre-eminent performer of the Moulin Rouge in Paris between 1892 and 1900. As his name would suggest, Le Petomane sang through his backside and boasted that he was "The only one who pays no author's royalties." His immense popularity no doubt resided in the notes produced through unconventional, and novel means, which 'doubled' some of the songs of ordinary cabaret performers. For more, see Nohain, Jean and Caradec, F., *Le Petomane: Or Gone With the Wind*, Trans. Warren Tute, London: Sphere Books, 1971.

48 Kierkegaard, Søren. *Stages on Life's Way*. Trans. and ed Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 17-18

silence? In fact the struggle between surdity and utterance is one which is never fully resolved for utterance and surdity can never be fully separated or differentiated from each other, but are always engaged in a struggle whereby one seeks mastery over the other.

In a passage remarkable for its similarity to Rabelais' gasterian figurations, Derrida, in his consideration of the sacrifice in *The Gift of Death*, notes that "Chaos refers precisely to the abyss or the open mouth, that which speaks as well as that which signifies hunger."<sup>49</sup> Here, chaos seems to be a consequence of the co-presence of the open mouth speaking while also signifying hunger. What is important here is the notion that the most complex utterances are those which expose the simultaneity of the surdic imperative, the chaotic, irrational and, importantly, the realm of the silent as well as the signifying utterance itself. Derrida develops this argument in an explicitly political context, pointing out that if an Abraham were to sacrifice his son in today's world, he would inevitably be condemned by any civilized society. Yet this "society", according to Derrida

*puts to death... or allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children (those neighbours or fellow humans that ethics or the discourse of the rights of man refer to) without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge such a sacrifice, the sacrifice of others to avoid being sacrificed oneself. Not only is it true that such a society participates in this incalculable sacrifice, it actually organizes it. The smooth functioning of its economic, political, and legal affairs, the smooth functioning of its moral discourse and good conscience presupposes the permanent operation of this sacrifice. And such a sacrifice is not even invisible, for from time to time television shows us, while keeping them at a distance, a series of intolerable images, and a few voices are raised to bring it all to our attention. But those images and voices are completely powerless to induce the slightest effective change in the situation, to assign the least responsibility, to furnish anything more than a convenient alibi. That this order is founded upon a bottomless chaos (the abyss or open mouth) is something that will necessarily be brought home one day to those who just as necessarily forget the same.<sup>50</sup>*  
[italics mine]

The gasterian figure which provides the ground for Derrida's polemic achieves its power through its association with Rabelais' Gaster. That is, the figure of the stomach is a convenient way of predicating the co-presence of a surdic imperative with the

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49 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 84

50 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 86

beginning of utterance (the open mouth). There is also the sense of the stomach as an organizing principle of political economy: hunger and greed and their justification become confused in the gasterian figure, a point that is common to Peacock and De Quincey.

In *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, we therefore find that the mute irrationality of the stomach precludes any active consideration of questions of immorality or impropriety. In the address to the reader it is noted that

on the one hand, as my self-accusation does not amount to a confession of guilt, so, on the other, it is possible that, if it *did*, the benefit resulting to others, from the record of an experience purchased at so heavy a price, might compensate, by a vast overbalance, for any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule [of guilt and misery shrinking from public notice].<sup>51</sup> [Underlining mine].

The public economy of ideas and utterances, as indicated by the metaphors of commerce, therefore subsumes questions of right or wrong. Instead, the focus of the above passage is the fluctuating struggle between the violence of surdic silence and the overreaching desire to be an uttering commodity in such an economy, a struggle grounded in the figure of the stomach.

There is, however, another aspect to the tension which relates to the speech of Messer Gaster which proceeds only by “signs”. This is the realm of the private sign, the dream, or more specifically, that which is not conscious. It is an adjunct to the surdic and as such is *epiphenomenal* to the tension between surdity and utterance. The link is hinted at in De Quincey’s detailed account of his first opium binge.

In the summer of the year we have just quitted [1813], I had suffered much in bodily health from distress of mind connected with a very melancholy event [the death of Kate Wordsworth]. This event, being no ways related to the subject now before me, further than through the bodily illness which it produced, I need not more particularly notice. Whether this illness of 1812 had any share in that of 1813 I know not: but so it was, that in the latter year I was attacked by a most appalling irritation of the stomach, in all respects the same as that which had caused me so much suffering in youth, and accompanied by a revival of all the old dreams.<sup>52</sup>

The tendency to depict the insurgent stomach as flanked by appropriately disturbing dreams is later qualified in the section dealing with De Quincey’s ‘Asiatic’ visions. In

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51 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 30

52 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 86

this section, the whole of 'Asia' becomes to De Quincey's mind a mixture of exotic richness and terrifying alienation. He admits candidly that "in China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, and the barrier of utter abhorrence, and want of sympathy, placed between us by feelings deeper than I can analyze"<sup>53</sup> and in a more reflective mode confesses that "sooner or later, came a *reflux* of feeling that *swallowed* up the astonishment, and left me, not so much in terror, as in hatred and abomination of what I saw"<sup>54</sup> (italics mine). This image of reflux is the inverse of the politics of inclusiveness of the symposium, expressive of fear and rejection of the economy of utterance. A similar instance to this occurs at the end of Flann O'Brien's menippean satire *The Hard Life* with the "tidal surge of vomit" that Finbarr experiences after his brother Manus suggests he marry Annie in order to get his hands on Mr. Collopy's estate.<sup>55</sup> Both instances share an almost involuntary rejection of the larger public economy, although in *The Hard Life* there is the added element of sexual disgust, which may well be disgust at yet another form of economy, the commodification of marriage.<sup>56</sup>

The contrary metaphors of regurgitation and ingestion suggest not only the origin of such visions in a Gasterian surdity but also the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of the violent relation between inner irrationality and the attempt to give/impose utterance. Further, the epiphenomenality of the dream vision is such that it is transgredient, or 'stepping over' in relation to utterance and surdity: it incorporates the silence of that which is "unanalysable" while at the same time expressing a fear of what Marx (Karl, not Harpo) called the Asiatic mode of production.<sup>57</sup> This fear is also based on an attraction: that which is not directly accessible to lived experience can be harnessed to allow utterance, an obliquity which seems to lie at the heart of all psychedelic literature.<sup>58</sup> Given De Quincey's by no means secure position within the economy of

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53 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 109

54 De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 109

55 O'Brien, Flann [Brian O'Nolan]. *The Hard Life: An Exegesis of Squalor*. London: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 157

56 Hopper, Keith. *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1995, pp. 70-71

57 Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1. Trans. Ben Fowkes. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, p. 479

58 One need not go beyond the hippy beads and sitars of the sixties, let alone the lyrics of bands such as the Beatles, the Jimi Hendrix Experience c.1967-8 or Burroughs, William and Ginsberg,

utterance in nineteenth century England, I would suggest that the Asiatic vision is interpretable as an icon of alienation and a desire for freedom.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. Peacock's *Gryll Grange* and Grotesque Association

The prose satires of Thomas Love Peacock are saturated with Gasterian figures. The divines are usually the principal such figures, with their names descriptive of their function: the Reverend Doctor Gaster of *Headlong Hall*, the Reverend Mister Portpipe of *Melincourt*, the Reverend Doctor Larynx of *Nightmare Abbey* and the Reverend Doctor Opimian of *Gryll Grange*. Auxiliary to these are an array of festive gastrolaters, such as Mr Hippy of *Melincourt*, Doctor Folliot of *Crotchet Castle* and Mister MacBorrowdale of *Gryll Grange*, among others. Each in his own way symbolises the festive significance of the stomach, in the Rabelaisian sense, embodying the symposiastic spirit of a non-consummatory communion. To this end, the gastrolaters are presiding figures over a symposiastic dialogue usually on a finite number of related topics. They are also, invariably, the sources of dialogue, provoking to utterance the irrational carnivalesque and are the sites of the tension between the dialogic and the non-linguistic.

In terms of the stomach, utterance is provoked by what it demands, alcohol and food, the very act of ingesting which tends toward individual silence. It also promotes a certain irrational deafness to what is drawn forth: a hubbub ensues. But even more than a tendency towards the irrational in a multiplicity of voices, there is also a 'mute' irrationality, verging on autism, in the utterances that are provoked. When Mister MacBorrowdale is asked his opinion on the use of perspective, or lack of it, in Greek painting, he replies "Troth, I am of the opinion that a bottle looks smaller at a distance than when it is close by, and I prefer it as a full-sized object in the foreground."<sup>60</sup> There is a curious redundancy to much of the symposiastic dialogue in Peacock: a non-dialectic series of dialogues which reflect the central role of the stomach in provoking utterance in a context where there is an equally strong tendency towards mute solipsistic pleasure.

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Allen, *The Yage Letters*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986. Excessive use of references to other cultures, other states of life, particularly childhood, also predominate.

59 Lindop, Gevel. *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas de Quincey*. London: Weidenfeld, 1981. passim.

60 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 176.

Beyond the immediate context of the topos of the symposium, it is possible to see the stomach as having a pervasive function in the menippea. Squire Gryll, in what appears to be an arch-conservative fashion, laments the introduction of the public examination system, as it promotes a system whereby “the test of intellectual capacity is in swallow, and not in digestion.”<sup>61</sup> It is, of course, tempting to regard such a metaphor as a transparent reaction to egalitarian reforms of mid-nineteenth century England. However, if the figuration of the stomach in this context is compared with De Quincey’s, the contrast is illuminating. The irritability of De Quincey’s stomach, and his accompanying paranoid fear of exclusion from the economy of utterance, betray a deep attachment to, if not desire to be part of that economy, to be in a situation where rejection of that desire ceases to devastate. De Quincey has a deep attachment to the ideological system which causes him so much anxiety. By way of contrast, the figure of the stomach in Peacock’s work is sumptuous and festive. The emphasis is upon digestion not ingestion (De Quincey was an opium *eater*, not a digester), upon rumination and not consumption. To this extent Peacock has a far more leisured, utopian approach to the ideological system of the economy of utterance. Because the symposium is a universalising process, all can be ingested and then broken down. Peacock’s fear, if any, is of indigestion: that the economy of utterance is structured in such a way as to resist surdity, and to resist alternatives. For De Quincey, consumption is a means to an end, so much so that the fear of not obtaining that end cancels out the ability to consume.

Of the prose satires of Peacock, *Gryll Grange* is the least characteristic. There is no particular *agelast* (a non-smiling comic character) who is the butt of satire, there is little violence and the diatribes of the symposiasts lack the vehemence of the earlier satires. The figure of the *alazon*, or impostor, which lends itself well to metaphoric duplication and in the course of comedy is capable of being multiplied endlessly, is only present in the figure of Lord Curryfin (and he is ultimately redeemed through marriage to Miss Niphet).<sup>62</sup> Whereas *Nightmare Abbey* and *Crotchet Castle* are populated with deceiving (and self-deceived) characters, the characters of *Gryll Grange* are all capable of self-realization, a feature which distinguishes the work from many of its other predecessors. One need only think of the succession of enemies that

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61 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 97

62 The term *alazon* is taken from Greek Comedy, and is used by both Cornford and Frye. Frye’s working definition is that of “a deceiving or self-deceived character in fiction, normally an object of ridicule in comedy or satire, but often the hero of a tragedy. In comedy he most frequently takes the form of a *miles gloriosus* or a pedant.” Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 365n.

Punch faces in the carnival puppet show. The notion of the impostor implies that dissimulation can be successfully challenged and exposed until the ultimate disguise is reached: once Punch has despatched the executioner, Jack Ketch, he finally faces the devil and defeats him in a climactic, furious struggle.<sup>63</sup> Another example is the proliferation of devilish figures in a later work, Mikhail Bulgakov's *Diaboliad*.<sup>64</sup> This final stage of the representation of repeated alazons is never reached in *Gryll Grange*. Instead, the comic myth that prevails is that of ritual marriage rather than a kind of expulsion of the *Pharmakoi*. The alazons that are present are generally depicted as sterile characters, amusing perhaps, but unredeemed by marriage nonetheless. What is relevant here is that the alazon is a one-dimensional character but is capable of almost endless duplication or multiplication in the work.

Most critics ascribe this to a mellowing in Peacock, having written it after an interval of nearly a quarter of a century of relative literary inactivity. However, it is not merely the tone of *Gryll Grange* which distinguishes it from his earlier works. Its gentleness is the result of characters who are given a psychological definition beyond their satiric function. To some extent, this would have been due to developments in the novel in the period between *The Misfortunes of Elphin* and *Gryll Grange*, a particularly appealing explanation for those who wish to claim *Gryll Grange* and its enhanced psychological definition for the novel. However, from the point of view of integral elements of Peacock's work, *Gryll Grange* represents the most complete development of the various aspects of Peacock's prose satires.

As noted above, the Gasterian figure exists at the crux of ideological debate on the one hand, and on the other it stands at the nexus of the struggle between surdity and utterance. It is with reference to both of these that the stomach acts as the coordinating figure of an *associational grotesque* which constitutes the aggregative structure of *Gryll Grange*. The Gasterian figure in Peacock's prose satires is usually somewhat central to the satire, but in no other satire is the Gasterian figure given representational powers of internal thought/dialogue. As Coleridge noted that the first Act of *Macbeth* is the keynote of the tragedy, so too the opening, digressive and associational lecture of Dr Opimian sets the keynote for *Gryll Grange*.

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63 Cornford, F. M. *The Origins of Attic Comedy*. Gloucester Mass: Peter Smith, 1968, p. 128

64 Bulgakov, Mikhail. *Diaboliad*. Trans. Carl Proffer. London: Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 3-47

*Ego sic semper et ubique vixi, ut ultimum quamque lucem, tamquam non redituram, consumerem.*

Always and everywhere I have so lived, that I might consume the passing light as if it were not to return.

— PETRONIUS ARBITER

'Palestine soup!' said the Reverend Doctor Opimian, dining with his friend Squire Gryll; 'a curiously palpable misnomer. We have an excellent old vegetable, the artichoke, of which we eat the head; we have another of subsequent introduction, of which we eat the root, and which we also call artichoke, because it resemble the first in flavour, although, *me judice*, a very inferior affair. This last is a species of the helianthus, or sunflower genus of the *Syngenesia frustranea* class of plants. It is therefore a girasol, or turn-to-the-sun. From this girasol we have made Jerusalem, and from the Jerusalem artichoke we make Palestine soup.

MR. GRYLL

A very good thing, doctor.

THE REV. DR. OPIMIAN

A very good thing; but a palpable misnomer....<sup>65</sup>

Of first importance is the lateral quality of the digressive dissertation. The explanation for the origin of such a palpable misnomer proceeds by philological association so as to suggest that there *is no such origin* other than in the present state of linguistic play, a fact emphasised by the chapter epigraphs, nearly all of which cite classical authors on the topos of *carpe diem*. From this can be adduced an ontological condition best exemplified by Andrew Benjamin's notion of 'anoriginal heterogeneity':

what is assumed by it is that the object can never be, *qua* object of interpretation, a unified site. Part of the becoming-object of the work of art will involve the recognition of a heterogeneity that, in precluding the possibility of unity, and thus in not being a founding moment can never, within the classical determinations of the word, function as an origin. And yet there is nothing prior to heterogeneity.<sup>66</sup>

While in some ways this can be seen to merely be a paraphrasing of Derrida's notion of *differance*, it can also be viewed as the metaphysical condition of the kind of play that characterises the menippea and the carnivalesque generally.

There exists also within this world of anoriginal heterogeneity a palpability or materiality to linguistic play. This is indicative of the struggle between the surdic

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65 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 97.

66 Benjamin, Andrew. *Art, Mimesis and the Avant Garde*. London: Routledge, 1992, p. 10

stomach provoked to utterance (the subject, of course, being food) and utterance deranged into a state whereby the immediate, palpable present is of primary importance. Indeed, this particular linguistic topos is repeated frequently throughout *Gryll Grange*. Two further passages may be cited as illustrations. The first merely adumbrates the link between surdity and utterance, and may thus be said to epitomise the significance of the figure of the stomach in a strictly formal sense.<sup>67</sup>

MR MACBORROWDALE

Troth, my lord, I think we have strayed far from the good company we began with. We have lost sight of Jack of Dover. But the discussion had one bright feature. It did not interfere with it, rather promoted, the circulation of the bottle: for every man who spoke pushed it on with as much energy as he spoke with, and those who were silent swallowed the wine and the opinion together, as if they relished them both.<sup>68</sup>

The second, while also linked to the themes illustrated above, opens up another, more complex area of association. Dr Opimian, while visiting Falconer, wishes to talk about Falconer's troubled courtship of Morgana Gryll, and while discoursing upon Scandinavian mythology quotes a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia* which stresses that warriors who are "free from that king of terrors, the fear of death" are eager for battle from the "conviction that it is cowardly to be careful of a life, which will come to him again."<sup>69</sup>

The Doctor repeated the passage of Lucan with great emphasis. This was not what Mr. Falconer wanted. He had wished that the Doctor should inquire into the cause of his trouble; but independently of the Doctor's determination to ask no questions, and to let his young friend originate his own disclosures, the unlucky metaphor had carried the Doctor into one of his old fields, and if it had not been that he awaited the confidence, which he felt sure his host would spontaneously repose in him, the Scandinavian mythology would have formed his subject for the evening. He paused, therefore, and went on quietly sipping his claret.<sup>70</sup>

Here we are given a representation of the workings of Opimian's psyche. He has been provoked to utterance by Falconer's surdity, but the lack of response to his

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67 By the use of 'formal' here, I merely wish to show how on a linguistic level, the absence and appearance of key words and phrases is dependent largely on a metaphysical and ontological consideration of the generic conditions in which the passage occurs.

68 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 213

69 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 421n. The passage is from *Pharsalia* 1. i. vv. 458-462.

70 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 301

utterance sets him off on a surdic associational train, from Pharsalia to Scandinavian mythology, thus temporarily quashing his usual verbal gusto. There is also a hint of the complexity which characterises *Gryll Grange* as a whole. The above passage can be seen as one of several nodal points in the work, with Opimian as gasterian figure central to it. It is held together by the irrational, associational links that form the representation of Opimian's psyche, relating the literary and erudite to the personal, and the sympathetic to the aesthetic.

To this extent the nodal points in *Gryll Grange* can be contrasted with the nodal points in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. In *Midnight's Children* the nodal points are sites of metaphorical transactions. Figures undergo grotesque transformations, enacting on a small scale the grotesque principle whereby history is re-evaluated as a series of grotesque events. In *Gryll Grange*, however, figures are not subject to grotesque transformation. Instead, the nodal points are the sites of grotesque association, by means of which a vast, complex aggregate emerges that defies simple explication. Whereas the grotesque transformations of *Midnight's Children* are capable of being viewed as constituent of an enormously intricate yet coherent structure, the associational grotesque of *Gryll Grange* resists such a systematic reading. The juxtaposition of Lucan with Scandinavian mythology, in the context of a mini-symposium hedging around the topic of love, and all of this taking place within Falconer's tower, has a complexity which resists simple elucidation. Rather, it is easier to regard such a passage as an opaque representation of conversation than a heterogeneous, associational complex whose centrifugal aspects are divergent, yet linked. In fact, to interpret the passage with regard to an 'end' or *telos* of representation would be to fly in the face of some observations in Chapter XIV which are largely concerned with aesthetics. One passage in particular demands attention:

LORD CURRYFIN

Detail has its own beauty. I have admired a Dutch picture of a butcher's shop, where all the charm was in detail.

THE REVEREND DOCTOR OPIMIAN

I cannot admire anything of the kind. I must take pleasure in the thing represented before I can derive anything from the representation.<sup>71</sup>

What is "the thing represented"? Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the conversation, Scandinavian myth or 'love'? The answer to this question is an unnecessary complication: rather,

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71 Peacock, *Gryll Grange AND Headlong Hall*, p. 176

Doctor Opimian's statement is the precondition for an associational grotesque in which a word is cut free from its referent, allowing it to freely associate, forming a representation of psyche as something which is actively directed along a series of associational connections.

The associational grotesque is best explained with reference to the crucial meeting between Algernon Falconer and Doctor Opimian in Chapter III of *Gryll Grange* and the associational resonances that follow from this meeting. As Doctor Opimian leans upon the gate of Falconer's residence and recites lines from the *Odyssey* which describe Odysseus's first viewing of Circe's abode, the theme which is so persistent throughout *Gryll Grange*, of the cultural and the literary having a direct relation to the personal is already apparent. To see Falconer's tower symbolically as Circe's retreat is to suggest some latent transformative power either in the figure of Algernon Falconer or in his abode. As Circe transformed men into swine, and later revoked the transformation, so the transformative power of Falconer or his residence would be one in which either human is transformed into beast, or man-beast is transformed back to human. *Gryll Grange* is therefore a subtle paraphrase of Gryllus's arguments in Plutarch's dialogue, "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti"<sup>72</sup>. Falconer's hermetic existence, his cultic adoration of Saint Catharine and his household of Vestal virgin housemaids are all impediments to the realisation of Gryllus's eloquent argument, that beast-hood is superior to person-hood.

This theme is further complicated by the iconography of Falconer's tower. In *Nightmare Abbey*, Scythrop's tower is a highly involuted symbol, giving birth to Celinda Toobad, thus incorporating the feminine within the phallus and rendering it sterile (a form of emasculation, as Scythrop's subsequent treatment in the book demonstrates).<sup>73</sup> In *Gryll Grange*, the tower symbolism is less singularly comic. That is, the functioning of the phallus with regard to the *whole* of being is considered rather than in its *singular*, comic context as a phallic symbol. As well as being a Folly, a useless but costly architectural structure and, by implication, also a fool's sceptre, or displaced penis, it is also subdivided, like Scythrop's tower, but with less theatricality, and more symbolic significance. It is possible to see the tower not only

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72 Plutarch. *Moralia*. Vol. XII. Trans. Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 489-536.

73 Peacock, Thomas Love. *Nightmare Abbey AND Crotchet Castle*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, p. 90ff.

as phallus, but as symbolic of the body as well. The division is tripartite: the library is at the top representing the supremacy of intellect, indicative of Falconer's unwavering Platonism. The second level is taken by the bedroom, and the lowest by the dining room. In terms of the anthropomorphism of the tower, the bedroom, as traditional site of dream and fornication, is displaced by the symposiastic, basal dining room. In terms of a hierarchy, we have intellect, dream and digestion in descending order of apparent importance, iconic of the bachelor Falconer's priorities. The inversion of the order with regard to stomach and dream/sexuality indicates that Falconer is ripe for the Gasterian intrusion of Opimian on the one hand, and the charms of the Circean Morgana Gryll on the other, as a means to begin living a completely fulfilled life. Opimian incites Falconer to engage bodily with the intellectual and, more importantly, physical aspects of the world. Morgana Gryll's presence is a temptation to replace a Platonic conception of love with sexual consummation. These incitements to engage characterise much of the tension between surdity and utterance which pervades the work.

Morgana Gryll represents both enchantress (indicated by her name) and love interest. In fact the two are inextricably intertwined. When Morgana's carriage is struck by lightning, her swooning form is brought into Falconer's residence, where she is placed in the visitor's rooms, situated between the tower and the gynaeceum, or female apartments. Thus, in a sense, the orgasmic moment has already taken place: in fact, the iconography of the two events (Opimian leaning on the fence and quoting Homer, and Morgana being received, in a swoon, into Falconer's home) prefigure the rest of the work — but it is only possible to read these events as portentous via a complex association of the arcane with the exoteric and the personal or interior with the esoteric. *Gryll Grange* as a whole exhibits a tension between learning as a publicly acquired skill, and the psyche as an internally developed entity. Falconer's development is through a process of grotesque association in which links are formed between the esoteric and the exoteric, the personal and the public, the uttered and the surdic. The direction, and stimulus, for this development is determined by the presence of the Gasterian Opimian. Opimian, who already stands at the nexus of the tension between utterance and surdity, is an exemplar for Falconer of how garrulous experience is provoked to utterance by jejune surdity, and how the mature, unspoken knowledge and experience of surdity eventually seeks to overcome the realm of the relatively unformed public utterance.

However, the path to such a romantic conclusion (a conclusion which is inevitable in, and integral to, all of Peacock's prose satires) is by no means straightforward. It is pursued by means of silent associations which we are left to draw between symbols, literary references, word-associations, discussions of the body, symposia, music, chess, dancing, fish and courtship. Yet, as shown above, in attempting to draw forth the associations implied between the various aspects of the work, we are in turn led further into fields of surdity, where association mutely piles on association. As scholars and hermeneuts explore and explicate, so they further obscurantise and confuse. In short, the associational grotesque is a form of aggregative structure which simultaneously invites and resists explication. The invitation to the further utterance of interpretation is only possible through the surdic, associational links which interpretation seeks to overcome. In the case of Peacock, and similar menippea, this aggregative structure invites interpretation partly because of its strict opposition to a precise formal structure.<sup>74</sup> Thus, it is possible to detect the tension or non-dialectical struggle on the level of associational grotesque versus form, on the level of explication versus obfuscation and on the level of utterance versus surdity.

In some way junctional, copulative or focal to all of these tensions is the figure of the stomach, whether as an abstraction in the form of the symposium, in the figure of a Gasterian character, or in symbolic acts such as ingestion, digestion, regurgitation or rumination. In each instance, the festive basis to the generation of meaning maintains its cynic origins, evaluating the definition of self in relation to culture which prefigures by forty years the other great writer of the body, Freud.

## 5. Romantic Menippean Satire and the Subjective Grotesque

For Bakhtin, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* was the first important example of a "new subjective grotesque", of which another variety was the Gothic novel.<sup>75</sup> This subjective, or Romantic grotesque as it is elsewhere termed, is characterised by its private "chamber" character, in which it becomes something of an individual carnival, in distinction to the public carnival of the medieval and Renaissance grotesque.<sup>76</sup> Other important aspects of the subjective or Romantic grotesque include the theme of

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74 See Butler, Marilyn, *Peacock Displayed*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 252 for a diagrammatic representation of the symmetrical plot-structure of *Gryll Grange*.

75 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 36-37.

76 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 37.

madness, which is no longer festive, but sombre and tragically individual; the dissociation of the carnival mask from its carnival context of gay relativity to a new context in which it hides a certain nihilistic presence; the use of the grotesque as a mode to liberate from dogmatism, completeness and limitation.<sup>77</sup> Bakhtin's formulations are of course dependent upon his earlier conception of the medieval and Renaissance grotesque as a generative, renewing and festive mode. Nevertheless, the great English Romantic menippean satires, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, and the prose satires of Peacock offer a significant corpus by which the "subjective grotesque" that is supposed to have developed from the time of *Tristram Shandy* can be gauged.

In general, these works can be characterised by a preoccupation with the associational and, with the exception of the *Biographia*, with the 'logic' of the body and its importance for meaning. The symposiastic elements of *Sartor Resartus* are particularly relevant to these considerations. A third of the way into *Sartor Resartus* we are introduced to the figure of Herr Towgood, or, "as it is perhaps better written, Herr Toughgut."<sup>78</sup> He is uncultivated, but soon becomes the friend of the Clothes Philosopher-to-be, Teufelsdröckh:

Towgood had a fair talent, unspeakably ill-cultivated; with considerable humour of character: and, bating his total ignorance, for he knew nothing except Boxing and a little Grammar, showed less of that aristocratic impassivity, and silent fury, than for most part belongs to Travellers of his nation.<sup>79</sup>

They later discourse on the cost of their education and the symposiastic bias of the work as a whole becomes apparent when Towgood exclaims to Teufelsdröckh:

'...At a small cost men are educated to make leather into shoes; but at a great cost, what am I educated to make? By Heaven, Brother! what have I already eaten and worn, as I came thus far, would endow a considerable Hospital of Incurables.' — 'Man, indeed,' I would answer, 'has a Digestive Faculty, which must be kept working, were it even partly by stealth. But as for our Mis-education, make not bad worse; waste not the time yet ours, in trampling on thistles because they have yielded no figs. *Frisch zu, Bruder!*'<sup>80</sup>

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77 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 37-44.

78 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 88

79 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 88

80 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 89

The gasterian imperative underlies all human endeavour, even the intellectual pursuits. This is not, however, a banal truism in this context. Towgood, or Toughgut, is the gasterian incarnation of *Sartor Resartus*, and when Blumine breaks off her budding romance with Teufelsdröckh, it is to Towgood that she ends up married. In this instance there is a carnivalesque inversion of the supposed hierarchy of the mind/body relation. But this is further complicated by Teufelsdröckh's observations on the stomach:

If man's *Soul* is indeed, as in the Finnish Language, and Utilitarian Philosophy, a kind of *Stomach*, what else is the true meaning of spiritual Union but an Eating together? Thus we, instead of Friends, are Dinner-guests; and here as elsewhere have cast away chimeras.<sup>81</sup>

It is precisely this "spiritual union" that is denied Teufelsdröckh, and it is at the hands of the "stomach" that his soul's happiness is denied him.

The grotesque association that sustains and gives structure to *Sartor Resartus* is far from being the 'cloak' which hides the more serious ideas that Carlyle wished to put forward. The style with which Carlyle 'clothes' his ideas is the means by which he can at once critique the present fad for rationality and open up further ways of considering the self, and rationality itself. When he has Teufelsdröckh write that "language is called the garment of Thought: however, it should rather be, language is the Flesh-Garment, the Body of thought,"<sup>82</sup> he is gesturing towards the grotesque associational quality of the work, and the way in which such considerations of style are inseparable from meaning. In turn, the analogous question of the inseparability of considerations of the body from thought and the psyche are also brought into prominence.

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81 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 90

82 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus AND On Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 54

# 4

## Print Technology, Scatology and Strategies of Subversion in Pope's *Dunciad*: Towards the Metaphysical Grotesque

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We underestimate this little hole, it seems to me, we call it the arse-hole and affect to despise it. But is it not the true portal of our being and the celebrated mouth no more than the kitchen-door.

— SAMUEL BECKETT, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable*, p. 74

### 1. The Genealogy of the Scatological in Comic Literature and Grotesque Metaphysics

To write about shit in a way that does not merely recede into medical, ethical or psychoanalytic discourse is more difficult than would appear. Metaphors of defecation and scatological imagery are fairly frequent in our culture, and there is a well-established tradition of the scatological in literature that extends from Aristophanes to Pynchon. More often than not it would appear that scatological writing serves the purpose of abuse or the expression of folk-carnivalistic humour. If one were to argue Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalisation of literary genres, the abusive and humorous aspects of scatology would constitute the major influences of the use of scatological imagery in genres such as menippean satire. This certainly is the case, but as with the idea of the continual renewal of a genre which is implicit in the ongoing development of a culture, the carnivalesque aspects of the scatological do not exhaust its potential.

Two instances from recent literature are appropriate to a consideration of the scatological in menippean satire: one from Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and the other from Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*. Firstly Kundera:

Shit is a more onerous theological problem than is evil. Since God gave man freedom, we can, if need be, accept the idea that He is not responsible for man's crimes. The responsibility for shit, however, rests entirely with Him, the Creator of man...

The fact that until recently the word “shit” appears in print as s--- has nothing to do with moral considerations. You can’t claim that shit is immoral, after all! The objection to shit is a metaphysical one. The daily defecation session is daily proof of the unacceptability of Creation. Either/or: shit is acceptable (in which case don’t lock yourself in the bathroom!) or we are created in an unacceptable manner.

It follows, then, that the aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist. This aesthetic ideal is called kitsch.<sup>1</sup>

And Barnes quoting Flaubert:

“I feel, against the stupidity of my time, floods of hatred which choke me. Shit rises to my mouth as in the case of a strangulated hernia. But I want to keep it, fix it, harden it; I want to concoct a paste with which I shall cover the nineteenth century, in the same way as they paint Indian pagodas with cow dung”<sup>2</sup>

In our own, as in most cultures, shit has always had an important moral, and hence satirical, function deriving from its power to shock and disgust: we discredit by “putting shit” or “pouring shit” on something; we give each other “the shits” on a regular basis; relationships are unsatisfactory when you are treated like shit; a bad thesis or paper is a piece of shit and we dismiss the disingenuous as shit or bullshit. What is also clear from these quotations, however, is that shit can be seen to have a metaphysical resonance or value. The design to shock is still there, but the shock involves a denial or acceptance, not of what should or should not be, but of what *is*.

Kundera’s consideration of shit derives from a long theological debate over the presumed closeness between shit and sin. The argument begins with the observation that if man is made in God’s image, then God must also defecate. However, shit and God are not compatible, for if shit is deemed imperfect, then it is evidence of an imperfect creation and/or creator. One resolution of this dilemma was that of “the great Gnostic master Valentinus [who claimed that] Jesus ‘ate and drank, but did not defecate.’”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Valentinus has referred to the closeness of sin and *skata*:

the heart seems to me to be treated somewhat like an inn, for that has holes and ruts in it, and is often filled with dung by men who live filthily in it and take no care of the place since it belongs to others. So it happens

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1 Kundera, Milan, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Trans. Michael Henry Heim. New York: Harper and Row, 1985. pp.247-9.

2 Barnes, Julian. *Flaubert’s Parrot*. London: Picador, 1984. pp.15-16

3 Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, p.246

with the heart as long as there is no thought taken for it; it remains unclean and the abode of many demons.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between what should be, and what is, is implicit in the transition that Flaubert makes from his own, quite literally infantile expression of frustration with the insensitivity and obtuseness of the nineteenth century to the more mysterious coincidence of the spiritual and the material in shit-covered Indian temples. Flaubert's rage gives him recourse to one of the most direct forms of its expression, the manipulation of excrement. But the daubing with excrement is also a metaphysical statement, reinforcing the connection between the fallen world and *skata* in general. An outburst such as Flaubert's is a gesture towards an envisioning of the world that could be provisionally termed a *grotesque metaphysics*. In this particular sense of the term, the grotesque is not so much a distortion of the world but an emphatic vision of how the world really is. It is demarcated from 'everyday' views of the world insofar as it is usually presented in the context of the *mundus reversus*, or world upside down.<sup>5</sup> In Flaubert's case, the image of shit rising to the mouth announces the inversion of the world and the subsequent gilding of the world with excrement universalises Flaubert's own anger and universalises the condition of inversion. However, once the *mundus reversus* becomes the condition of the world as represented, it is no longer a case of considering the grotesque as a phenomenon that is dependent on the everyday world. Instead, it is the condition of the world envisioned and the grotesque metaphysics that results that characterises a way of looking at the world which is endemic to the menippea and the comic tradition generally.

Before it came to refer to a specific mode of discourse or to what society fastidiously deemed "filthy literature", the scatological related to that "branch of medical science which deals with diagnosis by means of the faeces" (OED) — an appropriate metaphor for conventional satire. In the history of scatological literature, the original notion of scatology recurs frequently in a satirical context. An episode concerning Messer Gaster in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is salutary:

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4 Grant, Robert M. *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946. p.25

5 For a full discussion of the world upside down see Babcock, Barbara, *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Notwithstanding [the liberality of sacrifices offered up to him], Gaster confessed himself no god, but a poor, vile, pitiful creature. Just as King Antigonus the first answered a certain Hermadotus, who had in a poem called him god and a son of the sun, with the words: 'My Lasanophore denies it' — the lasanon being an earthen pan used to receive the belly's excrements — so Gaster referred these obsequious apes [Gastrolaters] to his close-stool, to see, to examine and philosophically to consider what kind of god they could discover in his faeces.<sup>6</sup>

Here the scatological as a medical tool is being satirised by virtue of the negative ethical aspects of excrement and its theological resonances being played against the diagnostic aspects of the inspection of ordure. The scatological, however, also involves a grotesquery which transforms this conventional satire, a satire with and of value, into a satire without value, without obvious moral utility or normativeness. This lack of value or utility is paradoxically predicated upon an initial negative metaphysics of shit, but through grotesque transformation becomes something much more. For example, a jest book from 1674, *The Complaisant Companion*, contains the following anecdote:

A Citizen that was more tender of himself then wife, us[u]ally in cold weather made her goe to bed first, and when he thought her plump buttocks had sufficiently warmed his place, he then came and removed her out of it lay in it himself [sic]; and to make himself merry, called her his Warming-pan; she not being able to indure this indignity any longer, one night (Sir Reverence) she did shit a bed; he leaping into it, and finding himself in a stinking condition, cryed out O wife I am beshit, *no Husband*, says she, *it's but a coal dropt out of your Warming-pan.*<sup>7</sup>

In a broader context, the grotesque transformation above has the potential, by association, to undermine the distinctness of value that shit and coal have apart from each other. That is, as shit and coal become transformative of each other, a carnivalesque ambivalence becomes predominant, which is in turn suggestive of a greater ambivalence which is characteristic of a grotesque metaphysics.

Another example is Martinus Scriblerus' *Art of Sinking in Poetry* which contains the following:

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6 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p.579

7 Lee, Jae Num. *Swift and Scatological Satire*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971. p.24

The Physician, by the Study and Inspection of Urine and Ordure, approves himself in the Science; and in like sort should our Author accustom and exercise his Imagination upon the Dregs of Nature.<sup>8</sup>

The humorous equation of scatology, in the medical sense, with imagination is transformative of both terms. While the satire is ostensibly directed against the practices of bad writing, there is a sense in which excrement is creative and expressive, as much as the economy of writing is dependent on waste and is depicted as a defecation of sorts. The scatological is one of several modes in the menippea where the boundaries between the body and the mind are undermined, or avoided altogether. It is one of the richest transformative modes in the grotesque tradition, yet literature about scatological writing lacks that same richness.

This is despite the fact that there is a long and rich tradition of scatological writing particular to English extending from at least Chaucer through Skelton, Nashe, Burton, Swift, Pope, Sterne, Joyce, Beckett, Barth, White and Pynchon, to name but a few. Critical literature that concerns itself with this scatological writing, however, generally falls into two main types. The psychoanalytic tradition explores anality and its relation to the psyche. In the psychoanalytic tradition, at least in its pre-Lacanian incarnation, the ethical value of psychoanalysis is as a revelation of the human subject as it really is. An example of this is Chester Anderson's article "On the Sublime and Its Anal-Urethral Sources in Pope, Eliot, and Joyce" which, among other points, analyses the similarity between *The Rape of the Lock* and the Fresca scene in *The Waste Land* (cut from the final version by Pound). Both are apparently "stylizations of anal fantasies" as are also Bloom's and Molly's anal fantasies in *Ulysses*.<sup>9</sup> Anderson later goes on to claim in relation to Joyce in general and *Finnegans Wake* in particular that "all sublimation, whether artistic, religious or whatever, is based on pregenital sexuality."<sup>10</sup> The scientific basis of psychoanalysis makes it a powerful tool for reclaiming the usually negative ethical aspects of shit for the higher, ethical purpose of the revealed 'truth' of the subject.

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8 Scriblerus, *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, p.29

9 Anderson, Chester "On the Sublime and Its Anal-Urethral Sources in Pope, Eliot, and Joyce" in Porter, Raymond J., and Brophy, James D., *Modern Irish Literature: Essays in Honour of William York Tindall*, New York: Iona College Press and Twayne Publications, 1972, pp.235-36.

10 Anderson, "On the Sublime and Its Anal-Urethral Sources in Pope, Eliot, and Joyce" in Porter and Brophy, *Modern Irish Literature*, p.245

Another tradition seeks to show why scatology is used as a ‘device’ of rhetoric or artistry, avoiding what it sees as the reductionism of the psychoanalytic approach. Instead of accounting for the scatological in terms of an ultimate psychic revelation, the aesthetic approach separates shit from images of shit and their manipulation. The focus of this approach remains fixed on the skilful use of scatological imagery, and argues that the moral value of this skill, particularly in satires with utilitarian value, by far outweighs the negative moral implications of *skata* in general. An example of this is Jae Num Lee’s *Swift and Scatological Satire*, in which he maintains that his approach to scatology is neutral so that he is “able to examine its literary functions in a given work and divorce them from such extraneous considerations as the author’s psychology or biography.”<sup>11</sup> In delimiting the text from the authorial and the psychological, Lee also drives a wedge between the scatological and literary manifestations of the scatological. As a result, scatological imagery that is not tied to intellectual, moral, religious or political satire is for Lee “merely stercoraceous”, with the result that

Jests in [the] stercoraceous vein do not have much point. Their main object is to elicit laughter by forcing excremental tales upon us so crudely that we are compelled to conclude that scatology is an end in itself, the main source of laughter.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from viewing laughter in a limited sense as a ‘release’ or Freudian cathexis, the censorious tone adopted towards the excremental reveals a latent allegiance to the Valentinian strictures against the potentially damaging revelation of universal defecation.

With a different emphasis, however, the morality of shit becomes the metaphysics of shit. Rather than the obscenity of representations of the scatological being merely morally reprehensible, the grotesquery involved can be a way to discover new perspectives on the world. This can be seen to be a condition of the grotesque in general: that its heterogeneity offers a means of discovery about the world. It can also be the case that the grotesque is a necessary ground from which any movement toward transcendence can take place. The alchemical tradition is a good example of this, particularly the supposed interrelationship between dung and gold. Barbara DiBernard cites Jung and his quoting and interpretation of Morienus’s emphasis on the acceptance of the low origins of the hermetic Art:

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11 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.3

12 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.26

'Take that which is trodden underfoot upon the dung-heap; if you do not, when you wish to climb the stairs, you will fall down upon your head.' By which he means that if a man will not accept what he has cast aside, it will force itself upon him the moment he wishes to climb higher.<sup>13</sup>

There is also a similarity between the grotesquery of *skata* with its metaphysical implications and other, morally problematic grotesquery and their metaphysical implications. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche presents the following exchange:

'Is it true that God is present everywhere?' a little girl asked her mother; 'I think that's indecent' — a hint for philosophers!<sup>14</sup>

The above passage is the inverse of the grotesque metaphysics remarked upon in relation to *skata*. As far as the scatological is concerned, the universality of what is negative in a moral sense becomes a universal condition of what *is*, and thus falls outside the scope of the morally normative. In the case of Nietzsche's theological speculation, what is seen as a universal moral good is shown to be incompatible with notions of 'goodness', becoming inextricably tied to its opposite. Although they are approaching a condition of grotesque metaphysics from different ends of the spectrum, the result is similar in terms of the validity of the *ought* of morality when confronted with the 'what *is*' of the world. In each case, morality understood as a condition of representations of the everyday world is sublated by a grotesquery which appears incommensurate with that morality. Thus when Nietzsche elsewhere exclaims:

even your atom, *messieurs* mechanists and physicists, how much error, how much rudimentary psychology, still remains in your atom! — To say nothing of the 'thing in itself', that *horrendum pudendum* of the metaphysicians! The error of spirit as cause mistaken for reality! And made the measure of reality! And called God! — <sup>15</sup>

the equation of the Kantian 'thing in itself' with the '*horrendum pudendum*' signals the valorisation of the grotesque as a strategy for revaluation, particularly with regard to its metaphysical implications.

While the satirical use of shit usually involves a morality of utility, the grotesque inversion of satire also means that the satirical use of shit becomes a metaphysical use of shit, which has a morality beyond that of satire. There is often, therefore, a conflict

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13 DiBernard, Barbara. *Alchemy and Finnegans Wake*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980. p. 15

14 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p.38

15 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols AND The Anti-Christ*, p.60

between the utility of satire (in terms of its *telos* or its external object) with the everyday morality that makes this possible, and the imperative of a grotesque metaphysics that insists upon the 'what is' that is revealed in terms of an inversion of that everyday morality. In short, the morality of utility is replaced with another, comic morality that radically transforms shit from something 'merely stercoraceous' to part of a renewing vision, a grotesque metaphysics of the human condition.

Accordingly, this chapter will enunciate the operation of a grotesque metaphysics in Pope's *Dunciad*, its relation to early eighteenth century print technology and to a reticular scatology that has relevance to the function of menippean satire and its consequent historical trivialisation.

Firstly, however, it is necessary to distinguish generally between scatological writing which concentrates on excrement and that which concerns itself with flatulence. The most obvious distinction is one of corporeality. Images of defecation, rejectamenta or the sewer invariably have the substantiality of the turd or the defecated material as their focus. For example, in *Tristram Shandy* the discussion on childhood prodigies is pursued to its logical conclusion:

But you forget the great *Lipsius*, quoth *Yorick*, who composed a work the day he was born;— They should have wiped it up, said my uncle *Toby*, and said no more about it.<sup>16</sup>

In *Eccius Dedolatus*<sup>17</sup> also and Nashe's *Martins Monthes Minde*,<sup>18</sup> defecation is equated with the production of literary works or seditious pamphlets. It is common for the 'work' as such, and the effort required to produce it to be equated with defecation. It is also common for an equation to be made between the materiality of language and of excrement, usually through grotesque transformations that centre on the corporeality of meaning and the "work", as in the continuing, punning motif of Barth's *Floating Opera*.<sup>19</sup> There is also the tradition of the rubbish heap or dung heap

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16 Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, p.331

17 *Eccius Dedolatus: A Reformation Satire*. Trans. and ed. Thomas W. Best. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971. p.70.

18 Nashe, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*. Ed. R.B. McKerrow. Vol.1 [5 Vols.] Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958. pp.51-64

19 *The Floating Opera* is characterised by a scatological symbolism in which the "vain illusions of each opera [die] in the lower material stratum of the material body". Chris Conti, unpublished paper "The Eyes of Interpretation."

as the source of 'the highest goal' of the alchemical tradition, the Philosopher's Stone. Citing the late Renaissance alchemist Edward Kelly, Barbara DiBernard writes

the [Philosopher's] Stone... is 'buried not only in the earth, but in a dung heap, and the common streets; for, as the sages say, it is buried in the streets.'<sup>20</sup>

DiBernard's argument concerning the alchemical influences on a work such as *Finnegans Wake* is that it is a rubbish heap and is also its antithesis: an ordered work of art. Literature arises from this dump, in the manner of the Philosopher's stone extracted from a dunghill.<sup>21</sup> An even more explicit example of this is Sir Thomas Urquhart's *The Jewel*, which is properly titled in a portmanteau word invented by Urquhart, ΕΚΣΚΥΒΑΛΛΑΥΡΟΝ, meaning 'gold out of dung.'<sup>22</sup> In Urquhart's case the "jewel" extracted from dung is his project for a universal language; in general, the connection between the dunghill and the transcendence it offers depends upon an initial acceptance of the dunghill from which the stone, or meaning can be gleaned. Similarly, Koestenbaum, in his study of the homoerotics of male literary collaboration, has noted Freud's reference in 1899 to his *Interpretation of Dreams* as a child germinated in the anus: he called it "my own dung heap, my seedling," and named Fliess its "godfather."<sup>23</sup>

There is also a sense in which meaning or value is not so much extracted from dung but is equivalent with it. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the recurring motif is of money as dung, and in Barth's *The Floating Opera*, the satirical method of inflation and deflation "transforms law, philosophy, death, money, reason and unreason into a palpable scatological reality."<sup>24</sup> In fact, Barth's work has been argued to envision the entire universe as a "floating opera" in all its scatological entirety.<sup>25</sup> William Burroughs takes this one step further in *Naked Lunch* where in Doctor Benway's fantasy of "the man who taught his asshole to talk" the man eventually falls victim to the megalomaniacal anus:

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20 DiBernard, *Alchemy and Finnegans Wake*, p.13

21 DiBernard, *Alchemy and Finnegans Wake*, pp. 13-14

22 Urquhart, Sir Thomas. *The Jewel*. Ed R. D. S. Jack and R. J. Lyall. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983. p.215n.

23 Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, p.37

24 Hawkes, John. "The Floating Opera and Second Skin". *Mosaic*, 1974 8:1 17-28. p.17

25 Korkowski, Bud [Eugene P. Kirk]. "The Excremental Vision of Barth's Todd Andrews". *Critique*, 1976 18:2 51-58. pp.51-58

Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk, too, and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: "It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat *and* shit."<sup>26</sup>

The fart, however, as Derrida has noted, escapes ontology in a way that the "work" that can be weighed, felt, or formed (as well as smelt) does not:

the essence of the rose is its nonessence: its odor insofar as it evaporates. Whence its effluvial affinity with the fart [*pet*] or the belch: these excrements do not stay [*se gardent*], do not even take form. The remain(s) remain(s) not... How could ontology lay hold of the fart? It can always put its hand on whatever remains in the john [*aux chiottes*], but never on the whiffs let out by roses.<sup>27</sup>

The comic implications of this aspect of flatulence have a rich potential. An example of this comes from William Hickeys' *Coffee-House Jest*s (1677):

A country woman that was a bold Gossip, came to a Butchers in *Oxford*, and when she saw a Shoulder of Mutton hang up, she askt him what she should give him for it? He told her two Shillings and a half: *Two farts and a half*, says she: *Why*, says he, *give me two farts and a half and thou shalt have it: Say'st thou so Boy*, says she, *Why then have at it*; then she lifted up her pretty right leg, and let a good one, *Well*, says he, *there's one*; then sweet soul, she lifted up her left leg, and let another as good; then lifting up her two legs one after another, she let a lusty one; *Well*, says he, *there's three, but where's the half one? Why*, says she, *take which half you will of the last, for that was a rowing one.*<sup>28</sup>

While a fart cannot be 'halved', the point of the jest is that there is such a thing as "half a fart" if one were to adopt a nominalist position. The humour of the above passage relies in one sense on the difficulty of maintaining the distinction between conceiving of half a fart and in the execution thereof.

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26 Burroughs, William. *Naked Lunch*. London: Harper Collins, 1993. p.110

27 Derrida, Jacques. *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1990. p.58.

28 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.25

More often than not, the fleetingness and impermanence of the fart is iconic of the transience of earthly existence, as in Claudius' death in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, where the ascension of his soul to heaven occurs while defecating, emphasised by the "death fart".<sup>29</sup> This is what Bakhtin terms the "Malbrough theme" whereby the coincidence of death or fear with defecation or farting degrades death or fear and transforms them into "gay monsters."<sup>30</sup> This association between the soul and the fart is more clearly demonstrated in Pantagruel's visit to the Island of Ruach (The Windy Island) Book IV, Chapter 43, where the inhabitants "all fart as they die, the men loudly, the women soundlessly, and in this way their souls depart by the back passage"<sup>31</sup>. The obverse of this is perhaps recounted earlier in Book IV Chapter 17, where among many strange deaths is "that of the timid fellow who so feared to let a fart and make a bad smell in the presence of the Roman Emperor Claudius that he dropped down dead, from holding his wind".<sup>32</sup> The image of shit has therefore more to do with the materiality of satire and the materiality of language. The image of the fart relates to the evanescence, or immateriality of existence and of meaning. Hence the flatus as wind and the afflatus as inspiration are often comically equated with each other. In the comic image of both the fart and shit, however, the usual "higher" realm of meaning and language is subverted, replaced and renewed by the "lower" realm of the body. Thus the cynics, according to A.H. Armstrong, characterised all else that did not matter apart from truth as *Tuphos*, "a magnificent term of contempt which combines the meanings of 'mist' or 'fog' and 'wind (internal)' with all their metaphorical implications, and may be translated 'illusion.'"<sup>33</sup>

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29 Seneca. *The Apocolocyntosis*. In *The Satyricon AND The Apocolocyntosis*. Trans. J.P. Sullivan. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977. pp.223-24

30 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.151n; p.173. Another excellent example of this is from Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk*. A man by the name of Jenom, deemed by a Mr Bílek to be an inappropriate suitor for the hand of his daughter, plucked up the courage to confront the father, but in his presence "farted so loudly that the pendulum on the grandfather clock stopped." The result is a form of social death: the daughter declares she does not want to know him and he experiences a form of social death being known in the town from then on as "Shitter Jenom". Hašek, Jaroslav, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.658.

31 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p.541

32 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen. p.489

33 Armstrong, A. H. *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*. 4th edn London: Methuen, 1965. p.196

In his essay "The Solar Anus", Bataille begins with the assertion that "It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form."<sup>34</sup> The first thing to be noted here is a denial of origin. Parody is paradoxically elevated to an autonomous ontological status; the world that he envisions is *a* world — indeed, it is *the* world. The second thing to be noted is that the metaphysical principles of this "world" to which Bataille refers revolve around the notions of orbiting, coitus, parody, eroticism. When Bataille notes that "the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus"<sup>35</sup> it becomes evident that those principles involve a certain grotesquery. That is, there is a heterogeneity of form which becomes inseparable from a notion of heterogeneous, and therefore undecidable, origins.

One principle of this cosmos is reflected in the description of an

eruptive force [which] accumulates in those who are necessarily situated below. Communist workers appear to the bourgeois to be as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts; sooner or later there will be a scandalous eruption in the course of which the asexual noble heads of the bourgeois will be chopped off.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, ethics have ceased to be relevant to this vision of Bataille; instead, the metaphysical principles of the world he has delineated necessitate revolution and excess. To see the world as Bataille depicts it in "The Solar Anus" is to recognise that such a world resists an ethical interpretation. It can be described, detailed, (re)presented, but defies interpretation on a moral level, on the level of value. The continual links that Bataille makes between the human body and the world, and much of the obsession with heterogeneous matter,<sup>37</sup> seem occupied with undermining a certain bourgeois morality altogether.

A cynical posture such as Bataille's is not unique, but its identification of a metaphysical universe that is familiar yet alien, is the salient feature I wish to draw attention to. The universe of which Bataille writes is an apocalyptic universe. It deals

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34 Bataille, Georges. "The Solar Anus" in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*. Trans. Allan Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. p.5

35 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.6

36 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.8

37 Stoekl's introduction defines this on p.xi as "matter so repulsive that it resisted not only the idealism of Christians, Hegelians, and surrealists, but even the conceptual edifice-building of traditional materialists. It was indeed an all-out assault on dignity."

with the revelation or uncovering of a truth that is neither absolute nor beyond. It is the uncovering of a knowledge that is synthetic and relativised, centred upon the body and bodily experience. Northrop Frye discusses the apocalyptic in relation to an *anagogic* phase of literary symbolism:

By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate.<sup>38</sup>

As distinct from the millenarian discourse of apocalypticism, the apocalyptic universe of the menippea constitutes a dissident metaphysics in the western tradition. In stressing the link between body and universe to such an extent, it is in fact closely allied with the principal features of carnival, which Bakhtin has so exhaustively detailed.<sup>39</sup> There is an analogous tendency of the apocalyptic and the carnivalesque towards totalisation or autonomy, much as Bataille's notions of a 'parodic' universe bestow a certain autonomy on parody. Neither the apocalyptic nor the carnivalesque admits of qualification. When we read works of literature in which the apocalyptic (satire as revelation) and the carnivalesque (satire as ambivalent celebration) are elaborated to their fullest degree, we find a grotesque metaphysics at work: a vision of the world or a world which does not admit definitive interpretation; a world in which what is "moral" has no ethical value.

## 2. Swift and Scatological Satire

Swift uses scatology more than any other major author in English,<sup>40</sup> and a consideration of this scatology is a useful and necessary introduction to the scatological aspects of Pope's *Dunciad*. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to look at the broader, grotesque implications of Swift's writing in order to establish an approach to scatology that will not be subordinated to psychoanalytic or moral considerations. In the fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels*, the Houyhnhnm who is Gulliver's master, observes of Europeans that "instead of Reason, we were only possessed of some quality fitted to increase our natural vices; as the reflection from a troubled stream returns the image of an ill-shapen body, not only larger, but more

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38 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p.119

39 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp.303-437

40 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.1

distorted.”<sup>41</sup> Some representations in Book IV are recognisable, others are distorted to the degree that they defy reduction or analysis. The grotesque logic that permeates the work is interpenetrated with the metaphysical character of the world it depicts and creates, to the extent that the moral quality of the satire, in the traditional sense of satire understood as operating normatively, is totally subordinated to a grotesque metaphysical vision, and therefore demonstrates a considerable resistance to interpretation. In fact, there is no one excremental vision, as Anspaugh has pointed out, but rather there are “multiple excremental visions — perhaps as many as there are visionaries.”<sup>42</sup>

One intriguing aspect of *Gulliver's Travels* is the way in which its structure implies a direction, or a telos. The first two books are satires of scale which are capable of being read normatively, and the following book appears to be largely concerned with follies of intellectual (mis)endeavour, the epitome of which is the Aca(ca)demy of Lagado. The tendency is clear: satires of scale, enlarging and diminishing the human body, followed by satire of systems of knowledge. The movement is towards transcendence, from body to mind. It is no surprise then that Book IV, the Voyage to the Land of the Houyhnhnms, has been criticised for its seeming gnostic quality, refusing to grant the concluding, triumphant upward-looking vision implied by the movement of the first three books. Quintana laments that “had part IV been toned down, *Gulliver's Travels* would have been a finer work of art”<sup>43</sup> and Dr Johnson notes that “the part which gave the least pleasure was that which describes the flying island, and that which gave most disgust must be the history of the Houyhnhnms.”<sup>44</sup> To dismiss these objections, as the unfortunately named Norman O. Brown does as “criticism... functioning as mask for moral prejudice,”<sup>45</sup> is to succumb to the temptation to replace one form of morality (in Quintana's and Johnson's case, a tendency to valorise decorum) with another, the Freudian paradigm. But there is a confusion here between what is repulsive, that is, what transgresses ‘acceptable’ notions of morality, and what is ‘moral’ in itself. Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is a

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41 Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. p.295

42 Anspaugh, Kelly. “Powers of Ordure: James Joyce and the Excremental Vision(s)”. *Mosaic*, 1994 27:1 73–100. p.74

43 Quintana, Ricardo. *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift*, London: Methuen, 1953. p. 360

44 Johnson, Samuel. *Lives of the Poets*. Ed John Wain. London: Dent, 1975. p.433

45 Brown, Norman O. “The Excremental Vision”, in *Life Against Death*, Middletown Ct.: Wesleyan UP, 1985, p.180

vision which resists reduction to the traditional normative operation of satire: there is no moral as such which can, or should be drawn from the parallel, yet divergent depictions of the sub-human, yet all too-human Yahoos, and the superhuman, yet inhuman Houyhnhnms.<sup>46</sup>

A crucial image of non-understanding in *Gulliver's Travels* is in Book IV when Gulliver returns to civilization via a Portuguese ship. He tries to communicate with the sailors who 'rescue' him, but being at a loss initially how to communicate, he attempts to speak in the language of the Houyhnhnms. The iconography of this is appropriately absurd, even carnivalesque — a man nonsensically whinnying like a horse. It is this kind of grotesque transformation, I would argue, which resists interpretation. The figuration of the Houyhnhnm is of a dual nature, as super-human and non-human. Gulliver's subsequent mock-transcendence over his latent yahoo nature is ambivalent at best, representing a denial of his humanity, as well as a recognition of what can be achieved through discipline — a horse-becoming which is in turn proved to be self-defeating, being mere beasthood, that which Gulliver found so repulsive in the Yahoos. Such is the absurdity of trying to locate a norm to Swift's satire. Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is a vision, a way of looking at the world such that its grotesque nature cannot be accommodated by any systematic reasoning.

Importantly, the scatology of *Gulliver's Travels*, and even other works such as *Tale of a Tub*, is fundamental to the creation of a grotesque metaphysics. For example, one of the many projects from the Academy at Lagado is that of the "projectors" or

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46 It might be pointed out here that the use of a horse as the focus of a menippean satire has a precedent in *Maroccus extaticus, Or, Bankes bay horse in a trance*. London: for C. Burby, 1595. "Some wit was reminded of Apuleius' Lucius, when the Scot showman Bankes visited London with a horse that performed counting and reasoning tricks. there seems also some allusive glancing at Curio's *Pasquilus Ecstaticus* (Englished as *Pasquin in a Traunce* by Phiston) in the title. In this dialogue, Bankes' horse is asked for his opinion of Puritan hypocrisy; the strategy seems to be to show that the horse acts less bestial than the Puritans do." Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, p.166. The same horse and owner is referred to in Jonson's "On the Famous Voyage":

But 'mongst these Tiberts, who d' you think there was?  
Old Banks the juggler, our Pythagoras,  
Grave tutor to the learned horse: both which  
Being, beyond sea, burned for one witch,  
Their spirits transmigrated to a cat;

(ll. 155-59)

Banks the showman and his 'talking' horse had an obvious appeal for the satirist. "The story of their both being burned by the Pope in Rome is probably untrue... G.B. Johnston (*Ben Jonson: Poet* (New York, 1945), p.26n.) compares Banks' situation to that of Alessio Interminei in Dante's *Inferno* (xviii. 115-26)" cited in Jonson, Ben, *Poems*, ed. Ian Donaldson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p.83n.

scientists attempting to turn excrement into food,<sup>47</sup> an actual experiment attempted by the Royal Society circa 1710.<sup>48</sup> This image is one of retrograde circularity which is symbolic of both the cyclical nature of the grotesque universe, and of its closedness. The same aspect is repeated in images of European and of Yahoo medicine. The absurdity of western homoeopathic medicine, where Swift notes that “Nature (as the physicians allege) having intended the superior anterior orifice only for the intromission of solids and liquids, and the inferior posterior for ejection, these artists ingeniously considering that in all diseases Nature is forced out of her seat; therefore to replace her in it, the body must be treated in a manner directly contrary, by interchanging the use of each orifice, forcing solids and liquids in at the anus, and making evacuations at the mouth”<sup>49</sup> is not much different to that of the Yahoos where their malady of hnea-Yahoo, or Yahoo’s-evil, is cured by a “mixture of their own dung and urine forcibly put down the Yahoo’s throat.”<sup>50</sup> There is a similar retrograde cyclicity to these images and of even more significance is the fact that Swift refers to the physicians as artists. Gulliver’s initial encounter with the Yahoos is when he is covered by their excrement, making them primitive artists, or satirists. Shit therefore functions as a means of denigration and of primitive artistic expression.

To abstract the quintessence of shit, then, is to recognise its ontological status as rejectamenta and primitive plaything, as creation and as defilement. Moreover, it has no origin, but is part of the endless cycle of the vegetative universe. From a metaphysical perspective, these different aspects of shit have an ambivalent value: contraries are reconciled, in that creation and destruction, waste and play are all present in the image of the festive turd. The world of the dingleberry, a term with which Pynchon refers to excrement in the form of a dag, is therefore a rich world, full of becoming, of possibility. There is no better example of this in contemporary literature than Slothrop’s descent into the nether-world of the latrines in *Gravity’s Rainbow* to find his lost mouth harp.<sup>51</sup> In turn, this is a latter day re-enactment of

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47 Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p.244

48 Nicolson, Marjorie Hope. *Science and Imagination*. Hamden, Ct.: Archon Books, 1976. Chapter 5 (with V. N. Mohler)..

49 Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p.301

50 Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, pp.309-10

51 Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity’s Rainbow*. London: Picador, 1973. pp. 64-67.

Jonson's "On the Famous Voyage"<sup>52</sup>, an apocalyptic 'scatascopia'. Which brings us to the world of Pope's *Dunciad*.

### 3. *The Dunciad*, Print Technology and Scatology

*The Dunciad* is a menippean satire which agglomerated over the years 1728 to 1743, existing in various forms until it was finally elaborated to the four book form in which we generally know it today. The *Variorum Dunciad* is a heterogeneous assemblage of poetry, footnotes, prolegomena, prefaces, prose arguments and other diverse generic and typographical conventions. Formally, the appearance of the *Variorum Dunciad* is similar to that of many other menippean satires, such as *Finnegans Wake*, *Ulysses*, *Tristram Shandy* and *The Tale of a Tub*.<sup>53</sup>

'Agglomeration' is the appropriate term to describe the process of inspiration and composition: the model of inspiration is to be found elsewhere in Pope's poetry. In the "Epistle to Bethel", inspiration is facetiously compared with defecation:

On morning wings how active springs the mind  
That leaves the load of yesterday behind!  
How easy every labour it pursues!  
How coming to the poet every Muse!

(ll. 81-84)<sup>54</sup>

As with the Yahoos, there is a certain artistry implied in the defecatory act. In fact, in Book I of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Gargantua's birth is preceded by an earlier, more fundamental birth:

A little while later she [Gargamelle] began to groan and wail and shout. Then suddenly swarms of midwives came up from every side, and feeling her underneath found some rather ill-smelling excrescences, which they thought were the child; but it was her fundament slipping out, because of the softening of her right intestine — which you call the bum-gut — owing to her having eaten too much tripe, as has been stated above.<sup>55</sup>

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52 Jonson, *Poems*, pp.77-84.

53 This identification of *The Dunciad* as a menippean satire is not without precedent. Philip Hoyt Holland, writing after Frye's discussion of menippean satire in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, cites the *Variorum Dunciad* as belonging to the tradition of menippean satires that succeed from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", p.161. Emrys Jones also correctly identifies the menippean heritage of *The Dunciad*, referring to the Lucianic Rabelaisian tradition. Jones, Emrys. "Pope and Dulness". *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1970 54 231-263. pp.231-263

54 Pope, Alexander. *Collected Poems*. Ed Clive T. Probyn. London: Dent, 1983. p. 277.

55 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p.52.

Defecation is the most primitive of ‘birthings’, evident in the passage from Rabelais and in a similar passage from Beckett in which Molloy tries to recall his mother:

Unfortunately it is not of them [bicycles and horns] that I have to speak,  
but of her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if  
my memory is correct. First taste of the shit.<sup>56</sup>

The connection which I am wishing to make here is between defecation as creative and as wasteful, and the analogy between this and artistic activity and expression. The image of artistic production as defecation is present throughout *The Dunciad*, and much of it is, I would argue, of an ambivalent nature. When speaking of those Dunces who are laureate poets, Pope represents the Goddess Dulness watching with pride as

She saw, with joy, the line immortal run,  
Each sire imprest and glaring in his son:  
So watchful Bruin forms, with plastic care,  
Each growing lump, and brings it to a Bear.  
She saw old Pryn in restless Daniel shine,  
And Eusden eke out Blackmore’s endless line;

(I ll.99-103)<sup>57</sup>

The image of bears licking their young into shape has an obscene connotation when read in the context of an immortal, endless line linking logorrhoea with diarrhoea. The iconography also works toward a scatological interpretation when considered as part of a reticular structure — small brown things emerging in an artistic/creative context.

By way of exploring this reticular scatological structure, I want to trace the use of the word “sable” throughout *The Dunciad*. Of all words associated with besmirchment in *The Dunciad*, the word “sable” appears most frequently. There is a sense in which the dunces are painted, and there is a sense in which they are artists, symbolically manipulating the sable hairs of a painting brush. The overall image is of a child smearing itself and its surroundings with its own excrement, similar to the expression of outrage Flaubert makes against the idiocy of the nineteenth century. The point that is emphasised in *The Dunciad* about the process of representation is that far from being mere exemplars of Dulness, the dunces are representatives of the iconological,

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56 Beckett, Samuel. “Molloy” in *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. London: Picador, 1979. p.17

57 All line references are to the Twickenham edition of *The Dunciad, Dunciad B* (1743). Pope, Alexander. *The Dunciad. The Poems of Alexander Pope*. Volume V. Ed. James Sutherland. 2nd Ed. London: Methuen, 1953.

transformed from fools into naive artists. Not only is shit seen as a symbolic tool, but the artistic process is depicted as a form of primitive play.

Initially “sable” is used to denote the sewage that constitutes the bed of the Thames. Before looking at the following extracts from *The Dunciad*, I want to make clear that the proper names of the dunces referred to are unimportant — suffice it to say that they are nearly all figures from Grub Street, that is, professional writers, hacks and scribblers. The first image is from the carnivalesque procession of the dunces to the Thames, where they are to hold their contests which parody the Games of The Fleet in Book V of the *Aeneid*:

This labour past, by Bridewell all descend,  
(As morning pray'r and flagellation end)  
To where Fleet-ditch with disemboгуing streams  
Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,  
The King of dykes! than whom no sluice of mud  
With deeper sable blots the silver flood.

(II 1.269-74)

One of the dunces dives into the Thames and returns to the surface:

When lo! a burst of thunder shook the flood.  
Slow rose a form, in majesty of Mud;  
Shaking the horrors of his sable brows

(II. 1.325-27)

And when Aaron Hill dives and returns to the surface disappointed,

He bears no token of the sabler streams

(II 1.297)

When Oldmixon receives Milbourn's robes in recognition of his superiority as an explorer of the “nether realms of wit”

Around him wide a sable Army stand,  
A low-born, cell-bred, selfish, servile band

(II 1.355-56)

The association of ‘sable’ with shit is enhanced by the rich vocabulary Pope brings to bear in developing his scatological vision. Thus, instead of ‘shit’ we have a lexical structure that works primarily in terms of colour:

In office here fair Cloacina stands...  
...Oft had the Goddess heard her servant's call,  
From her black grottos near the Temple wall

(II 1.93-98)

Nigrina black, and Merdamante brown,  
Vy'd for his love in jetty bow'rs below,  
As Hylas fair was ravish'd long ago.

(II.1.334-6)

Rolls the black troop, and overshades the street

(II.1.360)

The structure of naming also reinforces the scatological vision. Along with the obvious punning on names such as Cloacina, Nigrina and Merdamante, the choice of the Hylas episode from the *Iliad* is significant. The name derives from the Greek *hylé*, meaning 'wood' or 'matter' and in this context becomes yet another example of a scatological image. Along with naming, "black" and "sable" serve to describe fecal matter, and all become associated in a complex metaphorical structure which links the grotesque with the diabolical and the anarchic with the cloacal. The habitual darkness that surrounds Dulness and the dunces becomes, by implication the darkness of the sewer because of the resonances Pope has imparted to blackness. Therefore, when we are told that

There, dim in clouds, the poring Scholiasts mark,  
Wits, who like owls, see only in the dark

(III.1.191-2)

The obvious rhyme of "wits," already alluded to by Pope when Curll fishes in Cloacina's "nether realms for wit", combined with darkness, has the hint of the obscenity that accompanies most of the obvious inversions of reality, that characterise the dunce's world. Similarly, when Settle shows Cibber the Empire of Dulness, present and future, he declares:

See, round the Poles where keener spangles shine,  
Where spices smoke beneath the burning Line,  
(Earth's wide extremes) her sable flag display'd,  
And all the nations cover'd in her shade!

(III.1.69-72)

The standard of Dulness is, quite literally, shit and the connotation of "shade" is that of a darkness through besmirchment. Later, when Settle is momentarily distracted as "a ray of reason stole/Half through the solid darkness of his soul;" the Miltonic "darkness visible" has become palpable, emphasising the foul materiality that is the grotesque essence of Dulness. The diabolical is even more explicitly equated with the darkness of the latrine when "sable" appears in the context of a special guest appearance by Dr. Faustus. After Settle has paused in his peroration

His never-blushing head he turn'd aside,  
(Not half so pleas'd when Goodman prophesy'd)  
And look'd, and saw a sable Sorc'rer rise,  
Swift to whose hand a winged volume flies

(III 1.231-4)

Later, when Dulness is surrounded at her command by her minions, an image of constipation emerges — suggesting that mediocrity is linked to a failure to shit rather than its excess:

Prompt at the call, around the Goddess roll  
Broad hats, and hoods, and caps, a sable shoal:  
Thick and more thick the black blockade extends,  
A hundred head of Aristotle's friends.

(IV 1.189-92)

The repetition of “sable” in its various contexts makes it unavoidable that the scatological connotations of “sable” and “black blockade” be read as a series of clinging turds, even choking what sensible organisation Dulness' rule may hope to have. Finally, with the awful apocalyptic vision of universal darkness burying all, we have Dulness' triumph:

She comes! she comes! the sable Throne behold  
Of *Night* Primæval, and of *Chaos* old!

(IV 11.629-30)

The association of scatological imagery with the obscurity of Dulness and the ‘darkness visible’ of Book IV further enhances the scatological aspect of the poem. Words such as “pudding”, “solid”, “running lead” and “cackling” in this context all take on scatological connotations — in fact, it is difficult to read a sequence of five lines without some scatological inference. This associational process elevates the grotesque into a metaphysical state that seems to pre-date metaphysics as we know it, coeval with Chaos itself, the primal “Saturnian age of lead” to which everything must inevitably return.

The world of *The Dunciad*, then, is permeated by the grotesque in all details. Even the movement of Dulness from her throne towards civilization has a suggestion of a retrograde, cyclical movement, which is, by implication, anti-diurnal. The “myth of eternal return” is present throughout all permutations of shit and shitting, such that the defecatory ceases to have an origin, becoming instead a continuous process, subtending and superimposing upon what can be termed the Gutenberg logic of Grub

Street. By Gutenberg logic, to borrow the phrase from Alvin Kernan, I mean the inevitable consequences of print on literature and meaning. Firstly, the printing press is capable of producing a bibliographic deluge, much like diarrhoea. Secondly, print technology produces an entire apparatus such as pagination, indexes, section breaks, running heads and so on, that objectifies literature and, as Pope saw it, leads to obscurantism. Hence the satirical profusion of typographical apparatus in the *Variorum Dunciad*.

The creative life of *The Dunciad*, from 1728 to 1743, is therefore inextricably linked to the contemporaneous and unprecedented explosion in the growth of print technology in England, and in Europe as a whole: “figures show that the major attack on print in the first 1728 version of *The Dunciad* came at the end of a period of great expansion in printing activity”.<sup>58</sup> Not only was this explosion a part of what Kernan sees as the final stage of a transformation in European culture from an oral-scribal/patronage literary culture to a print/commodity literary culture. The difference perhaps is clear from a comparison of Pope with a poetic predecessor such as Dryden who depended largely on patronage for his existence. Pope, on the other hand, was probably the first entrepreneurial poet to subsist and succeed entirely on the basis of book sales. In fact Pope “got something like £5,300 for the six volume translation of *The Iliad* by first signing up 575 subscriptions at 6 guineas each, and then selling the rights to additional sales to Lintot for £200 per volume, requiring the publisher also to provide the original subscribers’ volumes plus author’s gift copies.”<sup>59</sup> This amount of money, which was a truly astronomical sum for the time, would not have been possible without changes to the Copyright Law. The Copyright Act of 1709 made the writer owner of his own writing so that for at least 28 years it could be sold like any other piece of real property.<sup>60</sup> This was as much to the benefit of authors as it was to publishers, as it abetted the disappearance of pirating printers, allowing publishers to fix prices at a level which ensured profit and permitted the author to share in it.<sup>61</sup> Prior to this, the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 was an equally epoch-making event in the history of the English book-trade. This removed the anomalous restriction of printing licenses to the four cities of London, York, Oxford and Cambridge, allowing

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58 Kernan, Alvin. *Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. p.62

59 Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson*, p.10

60 Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson*, p.5

61 Steinberg, S. H. *Five Hundred Years of Printing*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955. p.144

the extension of the printing trade to the provinces.<sup>62</sup> The number of printers increased dramatically as a result, leading to the explosion in the growth of print technology noted above.

From this point of view alone, it is difficult to understand *The Dunciad* as a normative satire upon the Dunces of Grub Street with their mediocrity as the focus. Pope was the pre-eminent poet of his age in an economic and critical sense, but to a certain extent he was also dependent on the existence of an economy of literature, and its consequent mediocrity, to be as rich as he was. This, I would argue, is one aspect of the grotesque metaphysical vision of *The Dunciad*: that is, there is an ambivalence in the depiction of the Dunces. They are denigrated, quite literally, but it is their antics and foibles which impart so much carnivalesque energy to the work that it is impossible not to read *The Dunciad* as a satire without utility.

*The Dunciad*, therefore, is a complex response to a transformation of literary culture which was effected and affected by print. Pope saw the grotesque implications of innovations in print technology systematically distorting and disintegrating the old aristocratic society and its system of letters. Print was both the image and instrument of these new ways of thinking and doing. The paranoid reality of *The Dunciad* is one in which the pre-eminent manipulation of Gutenberg logic and the economics of print technology by Pope is itself subordinated to that logic. In Pope's apocalyptic vision, a flood of printer's ink was a darkness that spread across the land, staining, as in his image of Fleet ditch running into the silver Thames, the white page, darkening the minds of the people and their rulers, obliterating polite letters, and finally extinguishing all light, to leave the land in ancient night and ignorance.<sup>63</sup> With typical grotesquery, that which illuminates (the printed page) also obscures (the equivalence of ink with shit).

The equivalence of ink with shit stresses the grotesque nature not just of the comic world depicted, but also the means of representation. The suggestion I would make here is that the Gutenberg logic is, in a grotesque context, also a grotesque logic of representation. A clear example of this is in *Finnegans Wake* where Shaun describes Shem the penman, his antithetical twin brother, in extremely unflattering terms. While

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62 Steinberg, *Five Hundred years of Printing*, pp.136-138.

63 Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters and Samuel Johnson*, p.15-16

his dwelling is described as being comprised of literary refuse, he is also described as having “made synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit’s waste.” In what is an extended parody of liturgical language, the exact manner of his manufacture is spelled out:

*Primum opifex, altus prosator, ad terram viviparam et cunctipotem sine ullo pudore nec venia, suscepto pluviali atque discintis perizomatis, natibus nudis uti nati fuissent, sese adpropinquans, flens et gemens, in manum suam evacuavit (highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!), postea, animale nigro exoneratus, classicum pulsans, stercus proprium, quod apellavit deiectiones suas, in vas olim honorabile tristitiae posuit, eodem sub invocatione fratrorum geminorum Medardi et Godardi laete ac melliflue minxit, psalmum qui incipit: Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis: magna voce cantitans (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated), demum ex stercore turpi cum divi Orionis iucunditate mixto, cocto, frigorique exposito, encaustum sibi fecit indelibile (faked O’Ryan’s, the indelible ink).<sup>64</sup>*

And the translation:

“First the artist, the eminent writer, without any shame or apology, pulled up his raincoat & undid his trousers & then drew himself close to the life-giving & allpowerful earth, with his buttocks bare as they were born. Weeping & groaning he relieved himself into his own hands. Then, unburdened of the black beast, & sounding a trumpet, he put his own dung which he called his ‘down-castings’ into an urn once used as an honoured mark of his mourning. With an invocation to the twin brethren Medard & Godard he then passed water into it happily & mellifluously, while chanting in a loud voice the psalm which begins ‘My tongue is the pen of a scribe writing swiftly’. Finally, from the foul dung mixed, as I have said, with the ‘sweetness of Orion’ & baked & then exposed to the cold, he made himself an indelible ink”<sup>65</sup>

Earlier, “the elements of literature are cooked alchemically after the Mutt-Jute ‘middenhide hoard’ discussion to produce Gutenberg and the printed word (20.05-11).”<sup>66</sup> The equivalence between waste and representation begs a comparison between the logic of *skata* and the thinking of mimesis. Solomon has noted that “in *Finnegans Wake* defecation always stands for creation.”<sup>67</sup> The equation of creation with

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64 Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake*. London: Faber and Faber, 1991. p.185.

65 McHugh, Roland. *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*. Rev. edn. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. p.185.

66 DiBernard, *Alchemy and Finnegans Wake*, p.15

67 Solomon, Margaret. *Eternal Geometer: The Sexual Universe of Finnegans Wake*. London: Feffer and Simons, 1969. p.11

defecation is developed further in Marshall McLuhan's thesis of the ten 'thunderclaps' of *Finnegans Wake* as menippean explosions of creative *skata*.<sup>68</sup> Patrick White, whose own *oeuvre* demonstrates a particular fascination with *skata*, writes in *Flaws in the Glass* of the descent into the "sewage and plastic of the late twentieth Century", of which he cautions against despair, adding that "it is possible to recycle shit."<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein, the mimetic possibilities of the scatological is implied in Coleridge's attack on fasting in *The Watchman* with the epigraph "wherefore my bowels shall sound like an Harp", suggesting a comic equivalence between flatus and afflatus.<sup>70</sup>

The reticular scatological structure of *The Dunciad* is inescapably metaphoric of Gutenberg logic. The image of sewage polluting the Thames becomes indistinguishable from the sludgification of black ink polluting the white page. Similarly the cyclical aspect of the defecatory process becomes analogous to the cyclical nature of the consumption of literature as a commodified object. In general the equivalence of the economy of print with the economy of defecation as image and as process is a fecal reification of the Miltonic "Darkness visible" as "Darkness Palpable". The imperative of the metaphysical grotesque is that *Paradise Lost* is transformed by *The Dunciad* into an epic of shitting and remaining clean. Satan is the dangerous subversive turd that must be kept out of pristine paradise at all costs. His expulsion from heaven is a cosmic defecation, Hell is the cloaca and, Satan's appearance in paradise is dangerous in the sense that it is a dirty overflowing of the sewer.

Behind this scatological remodelling of Milton lies *The Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno* in particular. The preoccupation with sin and its perceived connections with filth means that, as Lee observes, "Dante's hell is one vast excremental dungeon."<sup>71</sup> The description of sin is dominated throughout the *Inferno* by scatological imagery<sup>72</sup> and the climax of this occurs in the passage from hell to purgatory:

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68 McLuhan, Marshall. "Menippean Thunder at Finnegans's Wake: The Critical Problems." *DAI* 1983 April 43:10, 3315A-3316A.

69 White, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-portrait*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983. p.116.

70 Coleridge, *The Watchman* in *Collected Works*. No.2 Bollingen Series LXXV. Ed Lewis Patton. Princeton N.J. Princeton University Press, 1970. p.51

71 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.18

72 Lee, *Swift and Scatological Satire*, p.16

And if I was perplexed, at that moment,  
Let stolid people judge, who do not see  
What point it was that I had just passed.

(XXXIV ll.91-93)<sup>73</sup>

The ascension from hell through Lucifer's anus places the centre of the infernal regions in the satanic fundament. There is no clearer statement regarding the explicit connection between sin and excreta, just as there is no more comprehensive envisioning of the world through grotesque metaphysics. The comic vision is one of renewal and discovery and there is no better way to achieve this than through seeing the grotesquery of the world in modes that are themselves fundamentally grotesque.

The economy of print-technology, in terms of production, consumption and the never ending hunger of the public, can be characterised not by a digestive process, but by a defecatory process. It is further my contention that Pope, in constructing *The Dunciad* as a parody of the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*, was drawing those works into the metaphysical grotesque that characterises *The Dunciad*. In other words, the metaphysical grotesque draws all that it comes into contact with into the vortex of its own grotesque imperative. The parodic relation between *The Dunciad* and the *Aeneid*, *The Dunciad* and *Paradise Lost*, is transformational: priority ceases to be an issue. In fact, the parodying of the two epics is only possible through the priority of parody itself. Beyond the limits of historical necessity, the three works become co-eval, much in the same way as the *Iliad*, and its parody, *The Bratachomyomachia (The War Between the Mice and Frogs)* and *Margites* are (supposedly) co-original.

In fact, Pope claims of the *Margites* that "the first *Dunciad* was the first Epic poem, written by *Homer* himself, and anterior even to the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*."<sup>74</sup> A further definition of the metaphysical grotesque could be that it is a fictional set of hypotheses that infiltrate all levels of the work concerned: transformational, associational and linguistic. While these aspects of the grotesque are all manifestations of play, the metaphysical grotesque is a manifestation of the parameters of play: it is not equivalent with play, but is instead equivalent with the movement of play towards totalisation (as in its incorporation of seriousness). In the metaphysical grotesque, the totalising aspect of the world presented admits of no qualification within the text — thus *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Finnegans Wake*, and *The Dunciad* are self-contained worlds in

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73 Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. C. H. Sisson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. p. 193.

74 Pope, 'Martinus Scriblerus of the Poem', in *The Dunciad* ed. James Sutherland, p.48

which the operative grotesque processes are effects of, and create, a grotesque metaphysical vision, a way of looking at the world which is consistently subversive, an historical strategy of attack and dissidence.

# 5

## Enthymemic Irony in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: Late Romantic Menippean Satire and the *Nekya*

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### 1. *The Waste Land* as Menippean Satire

*The Waste Land* begins with an epigraph, spoken by Trimalchio in the *Satyricon* of Petronius. A translation would render the epigraph something like this:

In fact, I actually saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae dangling in a bottle, and when the children asked her (in Greek) "What do you want, Sibyl?" she used to answer: "I want to die."<sup>1</sup>

Generations of critics and academics have sought the "deeper" meaning behind Eliot's use of this quote<sup>ahien</sup>, concluding that it is an allusion to the kind of cultural degeneration depicted in Petronius' fragmentary work. It is read as a gesture of despair and also as a gesture towards a lost heritage which the poem then sets into play with the possible view to recovering a "lost" tradition. Yet few critics seem to have hit upon the fact that the epigraph is an elaborate joke, largely ignoring significant aspects of its literariness. In the first instance it is a gesture towards the genealogy of menippean satire, as Max Nänny has pointed out.<sup>2</sup> Joel Relihan notes that

What makes the *Satyricon* a Menippean satire is its critical dimension: the narrator, as many have pointed out, is an academic critic, a hypocrite and a fool who passively observes the decadent and fantastic scenes and society around him and who unites them through his wholly inadequate and comic attempts to understand them. Its content is that of Roman satire: understood as a satiric text in the traditional sense, its critical views of literary, religious, and social beliefs and practices of the early Roman Empire have made it a valuable historical document. But its medium is a

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1 Petronius. *The Satyricon*. In *The Satyricon AND The Apocolocyntosis*. Trans. J.P. Sullivan. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977. p. 67

2 Nänny, Max. "The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?" *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*, 1985 Dec. 66:6 526–535.

series of incongruous clashes of low-life characters and the literary models with which they so pompously inflate themselves.<sup>3</sup>

In the second instance the epigraph hints at an underlying coarseness — the kind of slum naturalism intrinsic to the *Satyricon* is common to *The Waste Land*. The overt sexuality of the *Satyricon* calls to mind the persistent theme of crudity in *The Waste Land*: “‘Jug jug’ to dirty ears.” In the third instance the epigraph points to a comic tradition: the context of the utterance is a feast the parvenu, ignorant Trimalchio hosts which foregrounds his own one-upmanship and ostentation. There is also the presence of the fantastic in the Sibyl, who was immortal and was Aeneas’ guide to the underworld. The Sibylline books or leaves which were reputed to have been written by the Sibyl and contained prophecies, suggest a fragmentariness which is an important aspect of *The Waste Land*.

There is also in the passage the intermixture of languages: the Sibyl says in Greek, the original language of the menippea, that she wants to die. Fun is being poked at the idea of an ex-slave, Trimalchio, boasting of having seen the Sibyl, but laughter is also being directed against a society in which learning has deteriorated to such an extent that distortions of meaning from a person such as Trimalchio are commonplace. The epigraph is not the only influence of the *Satyricon* on *The Waste Land*. In a letter to John Hayward, Eliot explicitly mentions several “points of similarity” between *The Waste Land* and the works of Petronius and Varro.

1. General form of work
2. Insertion of pieces reproducing the manner of previous or contemporary poets
3. Parody of tragic style
4. Popular speech
5. Scepticism and irrelevance<sup>4</sup>

In the rest of Nänny’s article exhaustive reasons are given for the consideration of *The Waste Land* as a menippean satire. In particular he notes:

it was the rediscovery of the MSS that really made it clear that Eliot could be considered an urban satirist in the Dryden tradition. For whereas the poem as it stands seems to contain little straightforward satire, the large excisions from the MS corpus, as Marianne Thormählen has pointed out, have a marked satiric dimension: “The Burial of the Dead” Nighttown

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3 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, pp. 91-2

4 Soldo, John J. “T.S. Eliot and the Classics: The Influence of Petronius”. *The Markham Review*, Winter 1982 11 36-40. p. 38

scene with its pathetic characters and their unheroic exploits; the Fresca episode which, as Eliot admitted in the Paris Review interview, was modelled on Pope's satire *The Rape of the Lock*; the "Death by Water" stanzas describing the sailors ashore as well as the strongly satiric details deleted from the typist episode. The removal of all these scenes and details, as Thormählen concludes, "reduced the satiric streak very considerably."<sup>5</sup>

The excision of the satiric focus still leaves a trace in the work that constitutes, as with Pope's *Dunciad*, a metaphysical grotesque. While overt, or normative satire was excised from the work, Nänny lists in detail aspects of *The Waste Land* which make Conrad Aiken's jocose description of *The Waste Land* as an *Anatomy of Melancholy*, for Nänny, the first correct genre-attribution of the poem.<sup>6</sup> A summary of Nänny's main points demonstrates the accuracy of such a genre-attribution, particularly in terms of Bakhtin's conception of menippean satire as a carnivalesque genre. Nänny has argued elsewhere for the menippean affiliations of Pound's *Cantos* as well.<sup>7</sup> While some critics, such as Bernstein, have disagreed with Nänny, charging him with misreading the work<sup>8</sup> others, such as Wang, concur, finding that "the Menippean interpretation of these two great poems adds an intellectual dimension to their extant biological, mythical, philosophical, psychoanalytic, theological and Marxist approaches."<sup>9</sup>

Hallmarks of the menippean character of *The Waste Land* include: a certain slum naturalism; unusual diction; intermixture of different languages and genres (including the notes); the contemporizing of mythical and historical figures such as Tiresias,

Nänny, "The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?" p. 526, citing:

- 5 Thormählen, Marianne. *The Waste Land: A Fragmentary Wholeness*. Lund: LiberLaromedel/Gleerup, 1978. p. 215
- 6 See Nänny, "The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?" p. 526. Aiken was reviewing Eliot's work in *The Dial*, 73 (1922) 611-16, referred to in Cox C. B., and Hinchcliffe A. P., [eds], *T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land: A Casebook*, London: Macmillan, 1968, pp. 91-9; 92
- 7 Nänny, Max. "Ezra Pound and the Menippean Tradition". *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship*, 1982 Winter 11:3, 395-405. pp. 395-405 and "More Menippus than Calliope: A Reply". *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship*, Fall 1984 13:2 263-268. Nänny's second article defends his reading of *The Cantos* against Bernstein's charge that the identification of *The Cantos* as a menippean satire constitutes a misreading. Bernstein, Michael André. "Distinguendum Est Inter et Inter: A Defense of Calliope". *Paideuma: A Journal Devoted to Ezra Pound Scholarship*, 1983 12:2 269-74. Nänny states that *The Cantos* were "inspired more by Menippus than by Calliope" although he argues that the work has strong ties to the menippean tradition rather than that the work is itself a menippean satire.
- 8 Bernstein, "Distinguendum Est Inter et Inter: A Defense of Calliope", pp. 269-74
- 9 Wang, An-Chi. *Gulliver's Travels and Chi-hua Yuan: A Menippean Approach*. New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 1995. p. 50

Philomel, Tristan and Isolde, Elizabeth and Leicester, Coriolanus, St. Augustine with fictitious contemporaries such as Madame Sosostriis, Sweeney *et al*; a strong confessional or autobiographical streak that is common to many menippean satires, such as *Midnight's Children*, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, *Ulysses*, *At Swim Two Birds*, *The Memoirs of Many in One* and *Moby Dick*; multiplicity of voices; its seriocomic nature; the presence of the fantastic; a concern with quasi-mystical and "ultimate" questions; occasional coarseness of tone; a tripartite structure of the world of Olympus-Earth-Hades; the *nekya*, or dialogue with the dead; the presence of preciousness and portmanteau words; a tendency to evaluate the general spirit of contemporary life.

Nänny concludes that the menippean character of *The Waste Land* constitutes, like *Ulysses* and Pound's *Cantos*, "literary expressions of a pervasive carnivalization of twentieth century consciousness and culture, expressions whose strongly ludic character demands an active participation in their carnivalesque games."<sup>10</sup> However, it does not necessarily follow from this, as Nänny concludes, that "dialogic discourse with its semiotic of carnival (implying the violation of contemporary codes), with its playing one mode of signification off against another, is deeply revolutionary."<sup>11</sup> Rather, it can be argued that the ludic semiosis of *The Waste Land*, in terms of its enthymemic and fragmentary character, can also be a gesture towards conservatism. This argument also has relevance to some of what are generally considered as "transgressive" post-modern texts as well. That is, the more elaborate the transgression of semiotic codes, the more knowledge of a sense of tradition is required.

## 2. The Enthymeme — the *How* and the *What* of Meaning

In his book *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*, Robert Branham writes in relation to Diogenes that

all true humour has an enthymematic [sic] character: it requires the audience to perform an act of mental collaboration that can be variously described as bridging a logical gap; moving between alien codes, frames of reference, or universes of discourse.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Nänny, "The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?" p. 535

11 Nänny, "The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?" p. 534

12 Branham, Robert Bracht. *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. p. 54

This treatment of the enthymeme begins with humour (presumably as a phenomenon) and quickly moves into the realm of formal literary consideration: that formal heterogeneity and discursive polyvalency, which are primary features of the menippea, have an enthymemic character. Similarly, Ernst Robert Curtius writes in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* of the *enthymema* as a rhetorical syllogism in the context of how rhetorical descriptions developed in treatments of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>13</sup> At the risk of conflating two very different thinkers, both definitions of the enthymeme diverge from a purely formal definition of enthymeme as a syllogism in which one premise is unexplained or assumed. Branham sees the enthymemic nature of humour as analogous to the enthymemic nature of the formal heterogeneity that characterises the menippea. Curtius similarly sees the nature of the rhetorical syllogism as enthymemic presumably as a means of accounting for the playful/pleasurable elaboration of rhetorical *argumenta* which do not become enmeshed in the formal logic of thesis, premise, conclusion. In general, the enthymeme relies on silence, just as menippean satire “relies for its meaning on silence, for the truth that appears between the lines, that emerges from the spectacle of inconclusive debate.”<sup>14</sup>

Consideration of the enthymeme can go no further than its formal or rhetorical manifestations without considering its derivation and wider implications. In Greek, *enthymeme* literally translates as “something located in the heart or mind.”<sup>15</sup> Another translation renders the same term as “under-mind-ed”, suggesting Bakhtin’s notion of the material lower bodily stratum.<sup>16</sup> The enthymeme can therefore be seen as a phenomenological characteristic of the rhetorical syllogism, of humour and of formal heterogeneity. In the case of Curtius it is as if the playfulness or *enargeia* of rhetoric is a precondition for the enthymemic nature of the rhetorical argument. The formal elaboration of an argument or rhetorical description must be elided in order to maximise pleasure or affect. Similarly, the analogy Branham draws between humour and formal heterogeneity implies that the same process of movement between different

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13 Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979. p. 193

14 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 36

15 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 100

16 Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Bakhtin School Papers — Russian Poetics in Translation, Volume 10*. Ed Ann Shukman. Colchester: RPT Publications, 1983. p. 12n. Shukman notes that “The Russian word here translated as implies is *podrazumevaemoe*, lit. (under-mind-ed).”

forms, frames of reference or realms of discourse involves a *play* and that this play is the condition of the enthymeme itself.

Other definitions of the enthymeme include another, rhetorical definition that Lanham records in his *Handbook of Rhetorical Terms*, where the enthymeme is “maintaining the truth of a proposition from the assumed truth of its contrary.

If it be great praise to please good men  
Surely to praise evil men it is a great shame”<sup>17</sup>

Another part of the definition of enthymeme, is the difference between information and knowledge. Jeremy Campbell, in *The Improbable Machine* writes “memory is organized in the brain in such a way that large amounts of relevant world knowledge are triggered almost instantly by a very small quantity of incoming data.”<sup>18</sup> Ong goes further and makes the link between the unspoken aspect of the enthymeme and the operation of the psyche, or subconscious:

It [the enthymeme] is thought of as concluding because of something unexpressed, unarticulated: enthymema primarily signifies something within one’s soul, mind, heart, feelings, hence something not uttered or ‘outered’ and to this extent not a fully conscious argument, legitimate though it may be. Aristotle’s term here thus clearly acknowledges the operation of something at least very like what we today would call a subconscious element.<sup>19</sup>

The enthymeme, therefore, points a way to what might often be the site of an “illogical” leverage that is essential to the elaboration of information from data.

Considering the enthymeme in these ways draws a subtle but important line between the kind of phenomenological theory of reading such as that of Jauss and a phenomenological consideration of reading, play or play of meaning. According to Eagleton, Jauss’ reception theory centres on “literature as defined and interpreted by its various moments of historical ‘reception.’”<sup>20</sup> This thesis’s consideration of the enthymeme, however, centres on play as a condition of reading and of meaning. With

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17 Lanham, Richard A. *A Handbook of Rhetorical Terms*. 2nd edn Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. p. 65

18 Campbell, Jeremy. *The Improbable Machine: What the New Upheaval in Artificial Intelligence Research Reveals About How the Mind Really Works*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. p. 48.

19 Ong, Walter J. *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. p. 12

20 Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, p. 83

this distinction in mind a third thinker who treats of the enthymeme, V.N. Vološinov, is relevant to consideration of its ironic possibilities in relation to *The Waste Land*.

Vološinov distinguishes between discourse in life and discourse in art in terms of the social purview which accompanies the utterance. In life the social purview that accompanies the utterance is primarily the “extraverbal context” which comprises “(1) the *common spatial purview* of the interlocutors... (2) the interlocutors’ *common knowledge and understanding of the situation*, and (3) their *common evaluation* of that situation.”<sup>21</sup> Thus when considering the meaning of any verbal exchange in life

the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its impact. Consequently, a behavioural utterance as a meaningful whole is comprised of two parts: (1) the part realised or actualised in words and (2) the assumed part. On this basis, the behavioural utterance can be likened to the enthymeme.<sup>22</sup>

Vološinov stresses the relation of material unity of the world and the speaker’s purview in any utterance to conclude that “every utterance in the business of life is an objective social enthymeme.”<sup>23</sup> The same objective social enthymeme is of particular importance in considerations of art. In the broadest terms, the difference between discourse in life and discourse in art is the degree to which the objective social enthymeme enters into that discourse as a constitutive part of the structure of its impact. In other words, “a poetic work is a powerful condenser of unarticulated social evaluations — each word is saturated with them. It is these social evaluations that organize form as their direct expression.”<sup>24</sup>

From this point of view there are at least two kinds of unarticulated social evaluations that can enter into a work: those that position the work (or in the case of genre, are positioned by the work) and those that comprise, enthymemically, the structure and meaning of the work. So far this thesis has identified various manifestations of the enthymeme — as humour, as rhetorical elaboration, as objective social purview — none of which is wholly distinct from the other. It is possible to consider the enthymemic character of a work not as a given extra-verbal or extra-poetic phenomenon, nor as a purely situated phenomenological thing but as a series of discontinuities, movements and plays that co-exist with, even contradicting, each

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21 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 99

22 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 101

23 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 101

24 Vološinov, *Freudianism*, p. 107

other. Consideration of the enthymeme with regard to *The Waste Land* will therefore show how an enthymemic irony operates within and around the text, at once radical and deeply conservative. However, before this can be undertaken it is necessary to consider the relation between Romanticism, Romantic irony and *The Waste Land* and enthymemic irony particularly with relation to its status as an enthymemic fragment .

### 3. *The Waste Land* and Romanticism

Northrop Frye notes in his *Anatomy of Criticism* that “Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Virginia Woolf’s last and most profound book, *Between the Acts*, have in common (a fact more striking because they have nothing else in common) a sense of contrast between the course of a whole civilization and the tiny flashes of significant moments which reveal its meaning. And just as the Romantic poet found it possible to write as an individual in continuous forms, so the ironic mode is rationalized by critical theories of the essential discontinuity of poetry.”<sup>25</sup> While Frye goes on to argue that Eliot’s and Pound’s encyclopaedic yet discontinuous poetic technique is the direct opposite of Wordsworth, it is interesting that he identifies an aspect of modernism, the brief illumination contrasted against a vast background, that is also an aspect of late Romanticism. The same could be said of Joyce’s epiphanies, especially in *Dubliners*. Harold Bloom makes a similar observation in comparing Eliot with Pater:

Eliot complained that Pater was neither a critic nor a creator but a moralist, whether in *Marius*, *The Renaissance* or elsewhere. Clearly Pater, whenever he wrote, was all three like Eliot himself. The confusion of purpose, in both men, was *well served by a late version of Romantic art, the usual mode for each being a flash of radiance against an incongruous or bewildering background.* [italics mine]<sup>26</sup>

The dangers inherent in identifying Eliot as a closet Romantic have been well documented. For one thing, his anti-Romantic line throughout his career as a critic is well enough known. Eugenia Gunner gives a comprehensive survey of the pitfalls of critics identifying Romanticism in Eliot’s work such as Frank Kermode, C.K. Stead, Edward Lobb, Eloise Knapp Hay and George Bornstein.<sup>27</sup> It is no outrageous claim, however, to assert that Eliot was forced to use some aspects of the Romantic heritage

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25 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 61

26 Bloom, Harold. *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in the Romantic Tradition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1973. pp. 187-8

27 Gunner, Eugenia M. [Jeanne]. *T.S. Eliot’s Romantic Dilemma: Tradition’s Anti-Traditional Elements*. New York: Garland, 1985. pp. 5-6

in order to promulgate the kind of “Traditional” poetry he believed to be necessary. Leaving to one side those aspects of *The Waste Land* which have Romantic undercurrents, the dilemma in which Eliot found himself was that in order to attack what he perceived to be the degenerate pervasiveness of Romanticism, he was forced to address the issue in those very terms to which he was so opposed. In a not entirely unrelated way, Bakhtin’s notion of carnival culture being at its strongest when in opposition to a monologism has the corollary that in a post-Romantic culture in which laughter infuses language, such an omnipresent carnivalesque leads to radical doubt. Eliot therefore can only address that condition of fragmentariness in *those very same terms* of laughter and doubt. Gunner expresses this in terms of Eliot’s own criticism:

*The Waste Land*, itself formed of fragments, both structurally and symbolically, functions in one way as a reflection of some English and German Romantic poetry’s lack of traditional form, which for Eliot may be taken as symbolic: it represents loss, a loss of belief, of direction, and of historical sense. If the only relation a poem bears to the past is a complete turning away, then it removes itself from evaluation by objective standards. It also destroys the coherence provided by a common sense of poetry, without which, Eliot claims, no new poet can develop.<sup>28</sup>

*The Waste Land* is a work inescapably permeated with a Romantic sensibility. At the same time it is deliberately conceived in terms of Eliot’s own anti-Romantic critical stance as part of an “ideal order.” These divergent aspects of the work are not reconcilable, but are also not entirely alien to each other. In a reading that responds to an invitation to participate in a ludic semiosis that is a characteristic of the menippea (and is a precondition of Eliot’s notions of an “ideal order” of Tradition) the Romantic sensibility illuminates, and is illuminated by, the obsession with Tradition.

In other ways Eliot’s own critical position at times seems to be at odds with the poetry of *The Waste Land*. In disagreeing with Middleton Murry, Eliot writes “the difference [between Classicism and Romanticism] seems to me rather the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic.”<sup>29</sup> Further, Gunner maintains that Eliot’s objection to the Romantic fragment “seems to rest on the Romantic poetic fragment’s philosophical basis. Eliot also condemned fragments of poems as thoughts that remained individual; they were incomplete in relationship to traditional literature.”<sup>30</sup> All of which is a far cry from

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28 Gunner, *T.S. Eliot’s Romantic Dilemma: Tradition’s Anti-Traditional Elements*, p. 41

29 Eliot, T. S. “The Function of Criticism” in *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, p. 26

30 Gunner, *T.S. Eliot’s Romantic Dilemma: Tradition’s Anti-Traditional Elements*, p. 39

Eliot's own description of *The Waste Land* as a "piece of rhythmical grumbling." As far as *The Waste Land* is "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" then the logic of the fragment, as a Romantic artefact and as a feature of the menippea, implicates Eliot in the Romantic tradition.

Another Romantic feature of *The Waste Land* is the figure of the quest. Much has been written about this, particularly given Eliot's own signalling of the importance, for the work, of Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. There are, however, other aspects of Romanticism which pertain to *The Waste Land* which are relevant also to the menippea. According to Relihan, "romance and menippean satire have similar origins, and their histories touch at a number of points. The *Odyssey* is for both genres a thematic starting point, whether as the wanderings that precede the reuniting of lovers and families or as the fantastic adventures of a narrator whose most practiced art is that of lying."<sup>31</sup> The coincidence of romance and menippean satire is by no means an unusual phenomenon. For example, Frye has noted that "there is a strong admixture of romance in Rabelais"<sup>32</sup> and the romantic elements of Peacock's menippean satires have been well documented.<sup>33</sup> Relihan speaks of what he calls the "Menippean romance", although his range of reference is limited to Greek prosimetric romances and the *Satyricon*.<sup>34</sup>

As far as *The Waste Land* is concerned, the modelling of the work as a modern-day *Satyricon* has several profound ramifications. The *Satyricon* has several features of the romance as well as being a parody of the romance, particularly the *Odyssey*. While it is a parody to the extent that homosexual love is substituted for heterosexual love, the triangle for the couple, realism for idealism, a hero who flees his destiny for one who seeks it, the episodic structure, the immature and weak-willed hero, the shipwreck and the hero's impending trial for murder are all elements of the romance genre.<sup>35</sup> In a sense, *The Waste Land* is modelled upon the inverted, parodic image of the *Odyssey*, yet still retains features of the romance common to both the *Satyricon* and the *Odyssey*. *The Waste Land* bears a similar relation to its precursors, the

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31 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 179

32 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 309

33 See Kjellin, Håkan. *Talkative Banquets: A Study in the Peacockian Novels of Talk*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1974 and Dyson, A.E. *The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony*. London: Macmillan, 1966. p. 57

34 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 202

35 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 94

*Satyricon* and the *Odyssey*, as the *Dunciad* does to the *Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*.

The coincidence of romance with menippean satire constitutes a particular form of romantic irony: the quest which is not a quest, the whole which can only ever achieve full representation as chaos. Menippean satire, particularly after Sterne, represents a special case of Romantic irony as “the product of a self-consciousness aware of both the proximity of chaos and the strength of artifice.”<sup>36</sup> In particular, the Romantic deployment of the grotesque after Sterne, which Bakhtin terms the “subjective grotesque,”<sup>37</sup> has further resonances with the menippea. Victor Hugo’s theorisations on the grotesque include the observation that in Romanticism (as with modernism), “comedy usurps the place of inadequate tragedy.”<sup>38</sup>

As an inadequate tragedy, *The Waste Land* is also associated with the grotesque, a connection which Schlegel made in fragment 424 of the *Athenaeum*. For Schlegel, the grotesque and the newer concept of tragicomedy together can “serve as a metaphoric transcription of bizarre aspects of the flux of historical reality — a notion that became a commonplace of Romantic pessimism and was inherited by Modernism.”<sup>39</sup> The “bizarre aspects of the flux of historical reality” also lend themselves to a distrust of closed systems. Tempting as it is to presume that Eliot’s conservatism is commensurate with a faith in closed systems, *The Waste Land* reads otherwise. Whether it reads as a lament for a lost “ideal order” or as a satire of that possibility, *The Waste Land* nevertheless shares with works like *Tristram Shandy* a Romantic irony which is the product of self-consciousness aware of both the proximity of chaos and the strength of artifice.<sup>40</sup> The lacunae and disjunctions in each are aspects of this Romantic irony, with the qualification that the artifice is all the stronger through apparent chaos. This particular kind of irony can be termed enthymemic irony and is a consistent feature of the otherwise heterogeneous and disjunctive form of menippean satire. Lacunae, aposiopesis, dashes and the boundaries between inserted genres in the menippea are all instances of enthymemic irony in the menippea. One particular

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36 Garber, “Sterne: Arabesques and Fictionality” in Garber, *Romantic Irony*, p. 38

37 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 36

38 Gillespie, “Romantic Irony and the Grotesque” in Garber ed. *Romantic Irony*, p. 337

39 Gillespie, “Romantic Irony and the Grotesque”, Garber ed. *Romantic Irony*, p. 331

40 Garber, “Sterne: Arabesques and Fictionality” in Garber ed. *Romantic Irony*, p. 38

aspect of enthymemic irony that is relevant to *The Waste Land*, and dear to theorists of Romanticism, is the fragment.

#### 4. *The Waste Land* as Romantic Fragment — The Logic of the Hedgehog

A fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog.<sup>41</sup>

From such misch-masch potpourri  
What are we to expect but poetry?<sup>42</sup>

Apart from the context of menippean satire, the epigraph from the *Satyricon* gestures towards the fragmentary nature of *The Waste Land*. The *Satyricon* is only known to us as a fragment and its original extent can only be guessed at. Moreover, the Sibylline book was a fragment of a much larger entity as Dionysius of Halicarnassus's account would suggest.<sup>43</sup> Hugh Kenner also notes that the tradition of the Sibyl involved another kind of fragmentariness:

The Sibyl in her better days answered questions by flinging from the cave handfuls of leaves bearing letters which the postulant was required to

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41 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum*, fragment 206, cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. p. 43

42 Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, Ed. Valerie Eliot. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971. p. 27

43 Dionysius of Halicarnassus writes:

It is said that during the reign of Tarquinius another very wonderful piece of good luck also came to the Roman state... A certain woman who was not a native of the country came to the tyrant wishing to sell him nine books filled with Sibylline oracles; but when Tarquinius refused to purchase the books at the price she asked, she went away and burned three of them. And not long afterwards, bringing the remaining six books, she offered to sell them for the same price. But when they thought her a fool and mocked at her for asking the same price for the smaller number of books that she had been unable to get for even the larger number, she again went away and burned half of those that were left; then, bringing the remaining three books, she asked the same amount of money for these. Tarquinius, wondering at the woman's purpose, sent for the augurs... and declaring it to be a great misfortune that he had not purchased all the books, [they] directed him to pay the woman all the money she asked and to get the oracles that were left.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus. *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*. Vol 2. [7 Vols.] Trans. Ernest Cary and Edward Spelman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961. iv 62 p. 465

arrange in a suitable order, the wind commonly blowing half of them away.<sup>44</sup>

It is also possible to conceive of *The Waste Land* as a fragment according to other criteria. For example, the most convincing argument for the fragmentary nature of *The Waste Land* is that it is evocative, if not synecdochic of a larger whole. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy describe this aspect of the fragment thus:

Ruin and fragmentation conjoin the functions of the monument and of evocation; what is thereby both remembered as lost and presented in a sort of sketch (or blueprint) is always the living unity of a great individuality, author, or work.<sup>45</sup>

Consideration of *The Waste Land* as fragment opens up two important and related questions. Firstly, what is the significance of *The Waste Land* considered as fragment or, more specifically, what is the significance of the logic of the fragment, which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy term “the logic of the hedgehog,”<sup>46</sup> with relation to *The Waste Land*. Secondly, to what extent is *The Waste Land* implicated in the genealogy of the Romantic fragment and to what extent does Romanticism implicate itself in a consideration of *The Waste Land* as a menippea?

Thomas McFarland uses the term *diasparaction* to describe fragmentation as a “being torn asunder” or a “rendering asunder,” and finds in Romanticism the diasparactive triad of incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin.<sup>47</sup> He writes

Diasparaction that incorporated the sense of ruin was also pervasive [in the Romantic era], whether the ruin was conceived as work uncompleted or as edifice decayed, whether as psychic inner ruin or material outer ruin.<sup>48</sup>

This is one point at which the menippea and Romanticism converge. McFarland notes that “unlike longing, [Romantic melancholy] is shorn of hope and therefore posits no otherness toward which to strive,”<sup>49</sup> reminiscent of menippean mockery which offers nothing positive in place of that which is derided.

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44 Kenner, “The Invisible Poet” in *T.S. Eliot. The Waste Land: A Casebook*, p. 179

45 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 42

46 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, pp. 39-58

47 McFarland, Thomas. *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. p. 5

48 McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, pp. 13-4

49 McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 17

There are two more aspects of the Romantic fragment that are relevant to a consideration of the Romantic aspects of *The Waste Land*. The first is the notion of what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call the System-subject: that which is designated by "The Philosophy of the Spirit" of idealism insofar as the ideality of the subject itself in its ideality or its absoluteness is designated.<sup>50</sup> The relation of the fragment to the System-subject is therefore at least two-fold. The logic of the fragment itself, the logic of the hedgehog, assumes "a fragmentary totality...[that] cannot be situated in any single point: it is simultaneously in the whole and each part."<sup>51</sup> This leads to the fragment figuring

the outside-the-work [*hors d'oeuvre*] that is essential to the work. It functions as the exergue in the two senses of the Greek verb *exergazomai*, it is inscribed outside the work, and it completes it. The Romantic fragment, far from bringing the dispersion or the shattering of the work into play, inscribes its plurality as the exergue of the total, infinite work. This is no doubt also because the infinite is presented only through its exergue and because, if the *Darstellung* of the infinite after and despite Kant, constitutes the essential preoccupation of idealism, then Romanticism, through literature in the fragment, forms the exergue of philosophical idealism.<sup>52</sup>

There is already an irony implied in *The Waste Land* as Romantic fragment: that it is already implicated in philosophical idealism, something that Eliot stridently wished to maintain separately. Significantly, the exergue or outwork figures prominently in the work of Derrida, where he "deconstructs" the notion of prefacing (that is, the conception of a structure of unification and totalization) in a preface to one of his books.<sup>53</sup> The significance of the exergue and the fragment for a fuller understanding of *The Waste Land* is crucial: considered from the point of view of the System-subject it is the exergue of a philosophical idealism with its fragmentariness working enthymemically towards the completion of the fragment as system, and also calling that system into play by virtue of its complete incompleteness.

The fragment is a significantly favoured mode of the comic, as the phrase "logic of the hedgehog" would suggest. To think of the fragment is in many ways to think of laughter. For the German Romantics, this formulation developed under the rubric of

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50 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 34

51 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 44

52 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 45

53 Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 1-59

*Witz*, meaning both laughter and sudden flash of knowledge. According to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, this 'knowledge' was something other than the knowledge available through simple predicative means, something that was not entirely linguistically derived:

*Witz* constituted the other name and the other 'concept' of knowledge, or rather the name and 'concept' of knowledge that is other than the knowledge of analytic and predicative discursivity.<sup>54</sup>

As far as *The Waste Land* is concerned, its fragmentary nature imbues it with the qualities of *Witz*, as a sudden flash of knowledge (contrasted against the course of a whole civilization, as Frye would have it) and as something which is akin to the more comic moments of revelation in the work. Considering *Witz* in this context is similar to considering the grotesque, particularly in the sense that the grotesque constitutes a sublime. The importance of the sublime for the Romantics was its co-existence, if not coincidence, with theories of the sublime. Gillespie notes that

the doubleness of our being which manifests itself from cradle to grave requires a dramatic art admitting both the "sublime" and the "grotesque" or negative sublime, in place of the now worn-out oversimplification of classical "beauty"<sup>55</sup>

The 'negativity' of this other sublime is questionable, although understandable. The tradition of the grotesque has meant that its traditionally consigned role as subterranean, marginal and at times, gleefully incoherent, has meant that in comparison to the sublime of ponderous peaks and vast oceans it appears in a less than favourable context. These comparisons are ultimately motivated by issues of taste, decorum and seriousness which are inseparable from the kinds of questions which delineate different strata of society. The grotesque sublime only seems to stand in relation to the traditionally conceived sublime as negative because of these differences and also, perhaps, because of its dangerous flexibility. The grotesque sublime represents an instant of revelation and discovery, all the more awe-inspiring, if that is to be the touchstone, because it stands against a comparatively flat background.

The operation of *The Waste Land* as fragment therefore works as an underminedness or enthymeme with relation to the predicative discursivity that no longer seems adequate to the task that has been set for it. In fact, the *Witz*, or enthymemic irony of

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54 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 53

55 Gillespie, "Romantic Irony and the Grotesque" in Garber ed. *Romantic Irony*, p. 336

*The Waste Land* endows the work with a sublimity which is quite different from the kind of sublime which might characterise works more central to the tradition which Eliot eulogizes. The irony for Eliot and many readers of *The Waste Land* is that the means by which this occurs is at odds with Eliot's own stated anti-Romanticism and would appear to be at odds with an avowedly classical sensibility. It also compromises Eliot's own notions of an "ideal order", bringing that notion into focus only by means of attaining to a grotesque sublime which is different to the sublimity of awe, fear and reverential repose.

With these points in mind, about the enthymemic nature of *The Waste Land*, and its status as Romantic fragment, we are then ready to engage in a close reading of the work which will examine the ironic implications of these features and position the work in a new context that will radically re-evaluate its meaning. In particular, considering *The Waste Land* as a fragment, or enthymemic exergue of the Romantic System-Subject, lays the ground for one of the more central motifs of the work, the *nekya* or dialogue with the dead.

## 5. The *Nekya*

In the "Burial of the Dead" the narrative voice has identified a crowd of dead souls flowing over London Bridge when one face stands out:

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!  
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!  
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
"Has it begun to sprout ? Will it bloom this year ?  
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed ?  
"O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,  
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!  
"You! hypocrite lecteur! — mon semblable, — mon frère!"

(ll. 69-76)<sup>56</sup>

This is an example of what is properly called the *nekya*, or dialogue with the dead. It is a consistent feature in western, and world literature, occurring in early Mesopotamian poems, in the *Aeneid* with Aeneas' consultation with Tiresias in Hades, in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus does the same and in countless other examples.

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<sup>56</sup> All line references to *The Waste Land* are from Eliot, T. S. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. London: Faber and Faber, 1983.

In the epic sense, the *nekya* is intended to be a vehicle for the revelation of "truth." The seer is consulted, the future is revealed, often in a proleptic way. In the menippean tradition the visit of the protagonist to hell is parodic of the epic tradition, where the inherent corruption and ridiculousness of the world left behind is realised. Examples of this include Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, the Emperor Claudius' descent into hell in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and canto XVI of Pound's *Cantos*. The menippean *nekya* plays deliberately on the conflation of the realm of the dead with that of the living, and can be termed, after Bakhtin, a threshold dialogue.<sup>57</sup> More importantly, works in which different, contradictory sets of conventions are set into play in the act of interpretation can be termed "threshold art."<sup>58</sup>

A good example of how the *nekya* works in the menippea is Lucian's long dialogue *Menippus Goes to Hell*. The dialogue begins with an Athenian called Philonides encountering Menippus in the street. Menippus is 'hamming it up' speaking in verse, quoting from Euripides' *Heracles Mainomenos*, *Hecuba* and *Andromeda* as well as Homer's *Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. When Philonides asks Menippus where he has been the answers are less forthcoming. The motivation apparently was

I travelled thither, dearest friend, to hear  
What said Tiresias, the Theban seer.<sup>59</sup>

an adaptation of lines from the *Odyssey*. What follows is a travesty of the heroic versions of the underworld. In fact, Menippus is dressed up with a skull-cap, lyre and lion skin so that he resembles a grotesque combination of Heracles, Orpheus and Odysseus. The hell that Menippus visits is an apocalyptic extension of life, providing a revelatory perspective. Death is the great leveller: Philip of Macedon spends his time repairing rotten shoes and Diogenes laughs at the presumptions of the rich. This hell is a *mundus reversus*, an inverse image of the everyday world: a motion is passed while Menippus is there that the souls of the rich and criminal be condemned to two hundred and fifty thousand years of transmigration from the body of one donkey to another. When Menippus finally confronts Tiresias, the blind seer's message is simple:

The best way to live is to be an ordinary human being. So give up all  
this metaphysical nonsense. Stop worrying about first principles and final  
causes, and forget all those clever arguments — they don't mean a thing.

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57 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 116.

58 Morson, Gary. *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1981. p. xii.

59 Lucian. *Satirical Sketches*. Trans. Paul Turner. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961. p. 97

Just live in the moment and get along as best you can, trying to see the funny side of things and take nothing very seriously.<sup>60</sup>

The *nekya* also appears in what are generally considered to be philosophical works. For example, in the *Apology*, Socrates fantasises with devastating irony about the nether world:

What would one not give, gentlemen, to be able to question the leader of that great host against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or the thousands of other men and women whom one could mention, to talk and mix and argue with whom would be unimaginable happiness? At any rate I presume that they do not put one to death there for such conduct; because apart from the other happiness in which their world surpasses ours, they are now immortal for the rest of time, if what we are told is true.<sup>61</sup>

The menippean hell is a locus of serio-comic revelation, and it is this aspect of the *nekya* that has relevance for *The Waste Land*.

The kind of intertextuality comprised by fragments in dialogue with indirect speech, with each other and with the dead that can be found in Lucian, is also operative in *The Waste Land*, with the difference that the *nekya* is not only a trope but also an elaborate textual strategy. The past is in dialogue with the present with the result that the experience of reading becomes an historically based construction of meaning. Thus in this case the apparently bizarre conjunction of different voices becomes a conservative strategy to ensure the preservation of culturally and historically determined meaning. Whether that meaning be pluralistic or unitary, it is the context itself that is being preserved, the context of the literary work or the ideological artefact as the site, and the only site, where the dialogic evaluation and continuation of meaning can take place. Therefore, according to the ostensible intention of *The Waste Land*, its meaning cannot even begin to be approached unless it is first elevated to a central, canonical place in twentieth century art. While a consideration of the nature of *The Waste Land* as a menippean satire problematizes this intention, it is worth examining how this critical attitude rests on a fundamental assumption on the part of many critics that there is an unproblematic “privileged perspective” in *The Waste Land* which makes an assessment of the work as a unified meditation on spiritual despair possible.

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60 Lucian, *Satirical Sketches*, pp. 109-110

61 Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. pp. 75-76

If one were to see the fragmentary nature of *The Waste Land* as representative of a unitary, if disintegrating consciousness which *contains* the many voices of the poem and is *constituted* by those same voices, then there is a spatialization of the metaphors of utterance such that this supposed “consciousness” exists *above* the voices it supposedly contains: a kind of *catascopia* that is, ironically, a characteristic of the menippea. This “consciousness” must therefore exceed that which constitutes it in a kind of transcendence while at the same time it must be manifest in the context of each voice in a kind of immanence, a blatantly arrogant contradiction which is often overlooked. The absurdity of an “aboveness” that can never be fully achieved, while working against interpretations of *The Waste Land* as meditation, aligns Eliot with the menippean tradition, particularly in terms of a comparison with Lucian. Branham writes of Lucian that

The search for a privileged perspective, or, as one critic put it, the desire to ‘get out in order to look in’, is a central preoccupation of Lucian’s work. His affinity for fantastic journeys and authorial figures who stand on the edge of society or above it, its critics and observers, manifests this tendency.<sup>62</sup>

These same aspects are evident in *The Waste Land* in the figures of Tiresias, the Fisher King and other figures, and read in its menippean context the preoccupation with a privileged perspective of outsideness or aboveness also involves a satire upon that very notion of privilege or *catascopia*.

When Gulliver is given the opportunity to converse with the dead in Book III of *Gulliver’s Travels*, his conclusion is somewhat coy and evasive:

It would be tedious to trouble the reader with relating what vast numbers of illustrious persons were called up, to gratify that *insatiable desire* I had to see the world in every period of antiquity placed before me. I chiefly *fed mine eyes* with beholding the destroyers of tyrants and usurpers, and the restorers of liberty to oppressed and injured nations. But *it is impossible to express the satisfaction* I received in my own mind, after such a manner as to make it a suitable entertainment to the reader.*[italics mine]*<sup>63</sup>

The *nekya* as a topos of dialogue with the dead is usually read in terms of its normative satirical value — that death is the great equalizer, the place where Achilles

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62 Branham, *Unruly Eloquence*, p. 23

63 Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 241

has ringworm<sup>64</sup> or where Claudius is Caligula's scribe.<sup>65</sup> There is usually, however, a problematizing of such dialogues with the dead which involves a passing over of basic problems between the possibility of 'utter' utterance and a surd, terrifying silence. The fact that such *nekya* can only exist as playfulness tends to militate against whatever 'normative' satirical truths may be revealed. Thus it is that Gulliver, instead of recounting at length his conversation with the dead, ironically relates his "insatiable desire" to *see* the dead. Yet the way in which his desire is configured does not admit of utterance — his satisfaction is "impossible to express" because it exists in a ludic realm that is antagonistic to or undermines utterance. With this instance of the *nekya* in mind, a tension, predicated upon desire, between utterance and surdity in *The Waste Land* will be examined in its menippean context.

Lacan locates the meaning the subject has for itself and for others in terms of a connection between death and surdity:

when we wish to attain in the subject what was before the serial articulations of the Word, and what is primordial to the birth of symbols, we find it in death, from which his existence takes on all the meaning it has. It is in effect as a desire for death that he affirms himself for others; if he identifies himself with the other, it is by fixing him solidly in the metamorphosis of his essential image, and no being is ever evoked by him except among the shadows of death.<sup>66</sup>

These connections have a manifold importance: it is no coincidence that Lacan chooses to frame the chapter from which this passage is taken, "Interpretation and Temporality", with the same epigraph from Petronius which begins *The Waste Land* and closes the chapter with the Sanskrit "Da Da Da" which closes the poetic part of *The Waste Land*. Both works (or only the one work, *The Waste Land*, if that is what Lacan intended) exhibit the same "other" utterances that frame them. Both are also rich in the surdity and playfulness of the silence of death, be it voices of the dead interanimating each other in the intertextual parody of Homer, as with the *Satyricon*, or of "tradition", as with Eliot.

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64 See Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen p. 266ff for a more extensive list.

65 Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis*, p. 233

66 Lacan, Jacques. *The Language of the Self*. Trans. Anthony Wilden. New York: Dell, 1968 p. 85

“The Burial of the Dead” is actually the disinterment of the dead, an opening gesture of a work obsessed, as with all modernism, with the desire to engage the dead, the past, in a very *present* dialogue, to provoke that which has no voice to utterance. The opening gambit of *The Waste Land* establishes a dialogical relationship between past and present. The enjambment of the first seven lines sets up a rhythmic cadence which achieves its plangency through isolating verbs of generation, cultivation, movement or nutrition from the objects to which they are linked, images of deadness, forgetfulness, dullness, cruelty and death. The effect of this, however, varies according to what one wishes to obtain from such a consideration. As far as the melancholy, meditative tone of parts of the poem is concerned, the dialogic relation is one in which past death and present unhappiness can co-exist only in a state of melancholy resignation. While it can be argued that this melancholy tonality characterises what is essentially a spiritual meditation upon despair and decay, such tonality gestures towards an important post-Romantic position of the relation between System and subject. Baudrillard writes that “there is in Benjamin and Adorno another tonality, that of a melancholy attached to the system itself, one that is incurable and beyond any dialectic. It is this melancholia of systems that today takes the upper hand through the ironically transparent forms that surround us. It is this melancholia that is becoming our fundamental passion.”<sup>67</sup> More importantly, this melancholia “is the fundamental tonality of functional systems, of current systems of simulation, of programming and information.”<sup>68</sup> With the apparent disappearance of meaning comes an overreaching desire to recuperate meaning in the form of the system, or in Eliot’s case, that of tradition. The anatomization of melancholy in *The Waste Land* has, therefore, far wider implications than mere “expression.”

Critics of *The Waste Land* have often observed how Eliot has used different fragments from “Tradition” to achieve the same plangent effect noted above.

Eliot’s use of Marvell’s *To His Coy Mistress* and Day’s *Parliament of Bees* is a case in point. The first use of *To His Coy Mistress*

But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

(ll. 185-6)

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67 Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. p. 162

68 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, p. 162

is a modulation of the original

But at my back I alwaies hear  
Times winged Charriot hurrying near.

(ll.21-2)<sup>69</sup>

and seems to be in perfect harmony with Eliot's own pronouncement in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in which works comprising that "Tradition" form an "ideal order among themselves."<sup>70</sup> The line following the slight modification of the original quote<sup>ahon</sup> modulates the *carpe diem* theme to a somewhat more carnivalesque evocation of mortality that Bakhtin ascribes to the grotesque.<sup>71</sup> In terms of Volosinov's linguistics, the quote<sup>ahon</sup> from Marvell considered as an utterance is completed by Eliot's own line, or utterance which follows. Its theme is modified enthymemically — the reader is encouraged by the context, or purview of the poem's surrounding lines to pursue a reading of melancholy beauty — even Spenser's *Prothalamion* in the preceding lines "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song" has an elegiac tone not wholly present in the original poem which was a nuptial song celebrating the double marriage of Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, daughters of the earl of Worcester.<sup>72</sup>

A consequence, or effect of this melancholy beauty is the perception that even in the present, "Tradition" still has relevance (if only by its absence) and can infuse a present sensibility with an added awareness derived from the perspective of history. At the same time, the modulation of the traditional utterance to an 'original' continuation of that utterance can be seen as metonymic of Eliot's notion of the "ideal order" of tradition modified by the addition of new works to that tradition. Such has been the

<sup>69</sup> Marvell, Andrew. *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell. Vol. 1 Poems*. Ed. H. M. Margoliouth. [2 Vols.]. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927.

<sup>70</sup> Eliot, T. S. *Selected Prose*. Ed. John Hayward. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953. p. 23

<sup>71</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 50

<sup>72</sup> Allison, Alexander W. et. al. [eds]. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. 3rd edn. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983. p. 146n. When Spenser writes:

When I whom sullein care,  
Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay  
In Princes Court, and expectation vayne  
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,  
Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne

(ll. 5-9)

the elegiac tone seems a strategic choice, lamenting the loss through death of his patron Leicester and looking forward to patronage from the ascendant Essex.

kind of reading of *The Waste Land*, leaning heavily on a kind of New Criticism, that is evident in such an influential critic as Hugh Kenner.<sup>73</sup>

There is, however, a double logic or an ironic aspect evident in such readings. Eliot's notion of works in tradition "forming an ideal order among themselves" is analogous to Saussurean 'structure' — that meaning is differential and that 'structure' has, as Vološinov terms it, an "abstract objective" ideality.<sup>74</sup> There is therefore the contradictory logic of Eliot's use of Marvell in this instance as constituting on the one hand a melancholic reification of part of an ideal structure, a poignant *parole* of a weighty and solemn *langue* of tradition. On the other hand, there is also the logic of structure, a *differance* — the modification of an 'original' utterance into something new has at its heart the play of signification, its difference and deferral. The "meaning of a work" in terms of its relation to the "ideal order" that forms tradition involves an endless semiosis, a ludic play which can only be fixed in the moment of utterance, or fixed by an enthymemic reading which passes over the trace of this ludism and 'discovers' an elegiac meditation on post-industrial society.

To put it another way, a work which consists of a melange of fragments demands an enthymemic reading, more so than any other. As a consequence, Bakhtin's notion of carnival culture being at its strongest when in opposition to a monologism has the corollary that in a post-Romantic culture in which laughter infuses language, such an omnipresent carnivalesque leads to radical doubt. Eliot therefore can only address that condition of fragmentariness in *those very same terms* of laughter and doubt, leading to the kind of radical doubt that pervades cultural, political and theological absolutes. Eliot's work and, to a certain extent modernism in general, are predicated upon the saturation of language with laughter and with the resurgence of the menippea as the appropriate vessel for many twentieth century theoretical and artistic texts.

In the enthymemic gap between utterance and textual response there is the possibility for more than *The Waste Land* as just meditative repose. In what appears to be a second reference to Marvell, the *carpe diem* motif appears again, slightly modified by the bringing of Sweeney to Mrs Porter and her daughter and then finally completed by the last line from Verlaine's *Parsifal*. Thus the combination of

But at my back I always hear

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73 See Kenner, "The Invisible Poet" in *T.S. Eliot. The Waste Land: A Casebook*, pp. 168-99

74 Vološinov, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 52-61.

from Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* and the lines from John Day's *Parliament of Bees*

When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,  
A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring  
Actaeon to Diana in the spring,  
Where all shall see her naked skin

become

But at my back from time to time I hear  
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring  
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.  
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter  
And on her daughter  
They wash their feet in soda water  
*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*

The lines from Marvell and Day combine to form a grotesque whole, an opalized fragment of the "ideal order" that is fitted with the concupiscent images of Sweeney, Mrs. Porter and her daughter in the sensual moonlight. Again, a reading of melancholy meditation can proceed enthymemically from intimations of mortality, from one poetic voice to another, to a debased present in which the heroic Actaeon is replaced by a vulgar Sweeney, the chaste Diana now presumably the madam Mrs. Porter. The folly of trying to overcome the vicissitudes of sexual temptation is adumbrated with Verlaine's ironic ending to "Parsifal" ("And, O those children's voices singing in the dome!") in which one temptation is replaced by another. Again, the integrity of the voice of a meditative consciousness is maintained, passing with ease among the fragments of that "ideal order".

But any enthymemic reading opens the possibility of completing the inferential syllogism in different ways. In this case there is a theme of displacement. Past is displaced into present, the vaginas of Mrs. Porter and her daughter (which were washed with soapy water in the original WW I Australian soldier's ballad)<sup>75</sup> are

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75 Torros, "The Hidden Years of *The Waste Land* Manuscript" in Cuddy, Lois A. and Hirsch, David H. [eds], *Critical Essays on T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land*, Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1991, p. 61 records that Eliot's manuscript of early poems was in a gray cloth hard-cover book inscribed "Gallipoli" with a date of 1915. Grover Smith records in his study on the sources of Eliot's poetry that according to Robert Payne, the song was originally an eighteenth century street-song. According to Smith

Several versions of "Mrs Porter" were current during World War I. C.M. Bowra states that the song was sung by Australian soldiers at Gallipoli in 1915, but he follows a red-herring in alleging that Mrs. Porter herself

displaced into feet and genital desire itself is displaced into vocalic desire. More significantly even, the utterance, beginning as a hedgehog of “ideal orderliness” ambles into a playful displacement that emphasizes the “slum naturalism”<sup>76</sup> of the present, and swerves further into the relative surdity of an alien tongue. There is, therefore, a series of enthymemic displacements analogous to grotesque transformation and analogous to the “true humour” of which Branham writes. In short, this enthymemic displacement can be characterised as a movement from utterance to surdity, in which the ‘utter’ meaning of tradition becomes, through the very nature of that “ideal order”, a surdistic resistance to the unitary meaning that would be present for the reader of *The Waste Land* as a meditation.

This aspect of *The Waste Land* is present on a structural level. The work as a whole is framed by a general movement from declarative utterance, or ‘utter’ meaning where the themes seem to coincide with the words that are actually there in the opening lines of the poem, to the final surdity of the Sanskrit ending:

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order ?  
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam uti chelidon* — O swallow swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*

---

“seems to have kept a bawdy-house in Cairo.” Although her reputation is still green in Australia, she is a mystery even there... Actually the words are well known “down under”:

O the moon shines bright on Mrs. Porter  
And on her daughter,  
For she's a snorter.  
O they wash their feet in soapy water,  
And so they oughta,  
To keep them clean.

Payne's text omits the feet:

The moon shines bright on Mrs. porter  
And on her daughter:  
She washes out her — in soda water,  
And so she oughta,  
To keep it clean.”

Smith, Grover. *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*. 2nd edn. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974. p. 86; p. 327n.

The first version cited by Smith was provided by Brian Elliott of Adelaide who, coincidentally enough, was one of the key figures in the Ern Malley Affair.

76 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* — Bakhtin identifies the topos of “slum naturalism” as an important aspect of both menippean satire and the development of the novel.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih

(ll.431-3)

Wayne Koestenbaum sees this as paradigmatic of the work as a whole in which “Eliot’s disorderly endings translate sexual desire into mystical language.”<sup>77</sup> This translation of desire into mysticism is not part of a transcendent vision of the work: the final vision is obscured by its linguistic otherness: it is tempting to view it as yet another example of a ludic preciousness, or deliberate obscurantism. The tendency of utterances to resolve themselves into states of surdity does not just result in another kind of unified position, as Nänny would have it, with *The Waste Land* having a “strongly ludic character demand[ing] an active participation in [its] carnivalesque games.”<sup>78</sup> In fact the work is both — in terms of Deleuze and Guattari it is a deterritorializing and reterritorializing machine, simultaneously entrenching the “ideal order” as a manifest utterance while also subverting that order as it swerves continually into a surdic realm of playful semiosis.<sup>79</sup>

Any enthymemic reading of *The Waste Land*, however, need not be limited to a quasi-phenomenology, or the identification of a series of displacements. I remarked earlier that Volosinov’s translation of the Greek *enthymema* into Russian renders it as meaning “under-mindedness,” suggesting a relation to the lower material bodily stratum that Bakhtin identifies in *Rabelais and His World*. This “undermindedness” is well described in Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais in which he characterises the entirety of Rabelais’s world as being charged with a “downward movement [that] animates all his images, all the leading episodes, all the metaphors and comparisons.”<sup>80</sup> Yet the “under-mindedness” of *The Waste Land* is not something that sits neatly beneath the utterance/surdity relation of Eliot’s engagement with his “ideal order” but complements it and is implicated in it to the extent that desire as representation and desire as under-mindedness are manifested in a vast reticulation that is analogous to the “metaphysical grotesque” that characterises Pope’s *Dunciad*.

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77 Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, p. 137

78 Nänny, “*The Waste Land: A Menippean Satire?*”, p. 535

79 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press, 1988. passim.

80 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 370

Most critics of *The Waste Land* have noted the prevalence of images of sexual dysfunction or impotence. Edmund Wilson is a typical example of the kind of school which reads such images as either metaphorical of a Puritan temperament or as an index of post-industrial sterility:

The Waste Land of the poem is a symbol borrowed from the myth of the Holy Grail: it is a desolate and sterile country ruled by an impotent king, in which not only have the crops ceased to grow and the animals reproduce, but the very human inhabitants have become incapable of having children. But this sterility we soon identify as the sterility of the Puritan temperament... the ascetic shrinking from sexual experience and the distress at the drying up of the springs of sexual emotion, with the straining after a religious emotion which may be made to take its place.<sup>81</sup>

But the motif of impotence, cuckoldry, emasculation or sexual dysfunction is a common menippean topos: Tristram (and Uncle Toby) in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Encolpius in the *Satyricon* are but a few examples. The diverse range of this topos would suggest that a common relation between desire as representation and desire as "under-mindedness" would be impossible to find. There is, however, a common menippean relation between these images of sexual dysfunction and an attitude towards representation. In *The Waste Land* the link between sexual desire and the desire to utter is made explicit early in the work, in "The Burial of the Dead".

'You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago;  
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'  
— Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing...

(ll. 35-40)

The desire to provoke the dead to utterance is as much a desire to provoke desire itself. This finds its most violent expression in the figure of Philomel, "by the barbarous king/So rudely forced", raped and then her tongue cut out. The treatment of this scene, with sexual desire reduced to horrible mutilation is also a swerving from the utterances of the dead to a state of surdity:

...yet there the nightingale  
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice  
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,

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81 Wilson, Edmund. *Axel's Castle*. London: Fontana, 1961. pp. 89-90

'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.  
And other withered stumps of time  
Were told upon the walls...

(ll. 100-105)

History itself, a phallogocentrism of sorts, is rendered impotent. The feminine, implicitly identified with "the usual adolescent course"<sup>82</sup> of Romanticism is mutilated and left only with a surdic, yet vulgar babble. Yet it is precisely the utterance of the dead which Eliot wishes to enact, setting his "ideal order" into a grand play of seriousness only to have his ironic distance to the present slip into a surdic semiosis that undermines the very theoretical foundations upon which his project is grounded.

The figure of Tiresias, usually read as functioning in *The Waste Land* as an icon of epic authority (Virgil, Euripides, Homer) has a menippean genealogy stretching back through Seneca, Lucian, presumably to Menippus himself. In the "Notes on The Waste Land" Tiresias is depicted as "the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest... the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem."<sup>83</sup> More importantly, it is the *way* Tiresias sees that is the substance of the poem. Tiresias is merely the master cipher of impotent figures such as the Fisher King, his androgyny a displacement of Mr Eugenides' homosexuality. Even the bad sex between the typist and the young man carbuncular is something that Tiresias not only *sees* but remembers:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

(ll.243-6)

Not only does he unite all the figures in the poem and see what is the substance of the poem but he is also emblematic of the grotesque vision of the work. As an ancient figure displaced to a tawdry present, a blind seer, an androgyne, he represents the movement of a displaced cancellation. And his most apparent manifestation, in the lines above, is grounded on the larger grotesque movement of the work, the displacement of utterance to surdity, the displacement of genital desire to an impotent utterance and, in terms of desire, the displacement of a desire for 'utter' representation to a surdic semiotic 'play' of reality.

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82 Eliot, *Selected Prose*, p. 49

83 Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 82 note to l.218

## 6. *The Waste Land* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

An illuminating comparison which makes clear the doubly ironic nature of genital desire and its relation to representation in Eliot's work is between the *The Waste Land* and another late Romantic menippean satire, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Carroll's affinity with the menippea has been remarked upon extensively. Northrop Frye has described the Alice books as "perfect menippean satires"<sup>84</sup>, and several critics have followed this identification. Edmund Miller has claimed the *Sylvie and Bruno* books as "archetypal menippean satires" although he sees this 'kind' of menippean satire as altogether distinct from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which is, according to him, an anatomy only.<sup>85</sup>

One of the similarities between *The Waste Land* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is that both works are examples of "threshold art": not only are different worlds liminal with each other, but so too are different discourses and systems of representation.<sup>86</sup> Another similarity between the two works is that both are examples of late Romantic menippea. Unlike the Romantic menippea of the age of Coleridge, Peacock, Hazlitt and Carlyle in which grotesque association foregrounds the more surd aspects of language and the body, late Romantic menippea exhibits a ludic fascination with the "System-subject" and the fragment, and the 'games' that can be played between each. Any menippean satire will always demonstrate a fragmentariness by virtue of its heterogeneous and disjunctive form. In *The Waste Land* this fragmentariness is self-conscious, stylised and literary. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the fragmentariness relates to elements of logic and mathematics put into play with each other in a *non-systematic* way.

As far as the enthymemic relation between "fragment" and "System-subject" is present in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, knowledge as a pedagogical system, and mathematics as an abstract objective system are satirised in a way that perpetuates

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84 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 310

85 Miller, "It Thought it were a Mouse Trap: The *Sylvie and Bruno* Books as Archetypal Menippean Satire." pp. 112-116. See also Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. "Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass: A Menippean Assessment and Rhetorical Analysis of Carroll's Alice Books." *DAI* 1988 Dec., 49:6 1461A.

86 For a discussion of the "threshold dialogue" see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 111; p. 116. For the concept of "threshold art", derived from Bakhtin's stress on the importance of the threshold, see Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre*, pp. 49-51

nonsense as a way of looking at the world. Knowledge of knowledge involves a ludic movement and is “underminded” by an uninhibited desire that contrasts with Eliot’s ironic attempts to ‘fix’ an “ideal order” that is undermined by a movement of desire and its cancellation. This is evident in the differences between representations of Alice’s body, and the representations of desire in *The Waste Land*.

Alice’s body can be read as a grotesque fusion of object-of-desire (evident in Carroll’s paedophilic passion for little girls) and object-as-desire (Alice as phallus). In her psychoanalytic study of Swift and Carroll, Phyllis Greenacre notes a tendency for Carroll’s joy of winning a logical argument to be fused with extreme physical agitation. Her contention is that eroticization and generalized motor stimulation acquire a certain equivalence:

in such states of generalized explosive excitement some diffuse eroticization occurs, so that generalized motor and sexual stimulation become more or less fused. Instead of acting in a somewhat reciprocal fashion as they do in many people, so that repression in the one area increases the tendency to activity in the other, denial of the privilege of one sort of experience predisposes them to (self-) denial of experience of the other sort. Indeed the explosion of rage has, in its form, a rise to a pitch or climax followed by a sudden deflation, which fits well with physical erotic climactic patterns. This confluence of patterns promotes the continual linking of the two drives even later in life. The sexual, orgasmic climax is then feared as though it were destructive. Such orgasmic explosions occur at the end of both *Alice* books, and *Alice awakes*.<sup>87</sup>

Apart from these orgasmic climaxes, throughout her adventures Alice is continually moving to and from a state of tumescence. A.M.E. Goldschmitt has commented on the phallic significance of Alice’s growing and shrinking, particularly her neck.<sup>88</sup> The identification of Alice as phallus is implicit in several parts of the work, an example being the Pigeon that calls Alice a serpent.

“Come, my head’s free at last!” said Alice in a tone of delight, which changed into alarm in another moment, when she found that her shoulders were nowhere to be found: all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.<sup>89</sup>

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87 Greenacre, Phyllis. *Swift and Carroll: A Psychoanalytic Study of Two Lives*. New York: International Universities Press, 1955. pp. 225-26.

88 Cited in Fraser, Morris, *The Death of Narcissus*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1976, p. 2

89 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 74

In this state of uninhibited tumescence, the pigeon she encounters, “beating her violently with its wings”, calls her a serpent, an intruder in the garden of wonderful delight. Similarly, whenever Alice wants to enter a house, such as that of the Duchess, she nibbles parts of the mushroom (another phallic image) to reach the requisite size, in this case being “nine inches high”.<sup>90</sup>

Fluidity of size does not belong to the realm of normative satires of scale as with Gulliver’s revelations in Lilliput and Brobdingnag. In fact, the fluidity of scale that characterises *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* contrasts with that of *Gulliver’s Travels* in terms of the kind of pleasure associated with such exhibitionism. Greenacre contends that Swift’s expansion and shrinking of Gulliver is an exhibitionism which “is largely expressed in excretory rather than in genital sexual or reproductive terms.”<sup>91</sup> By contrast, Alice’s exhibitionism is largely genital and phallic in nature, and her expanding and contracting state has the quality of a prolonged erethism.

Greenacre sees that the process of identification of Alice with phallus is the consequence of Carroll’s strictly disciplined upbringing:

Had not the aggressive and sexual drives been too firmly checked in him, it is probable that he would have fulfilled many times over the promise of intellectual genius which was early noted. As his early life developed, however, it was only in its less official aspects that those drives broke through and found at least partially sublimated outlets in his writing and in his photography.<sup>92</sup>

However, it is equally possible to argue that the fusion of eroticization with motor stimulation is an analogue of the pleasure of nonsense and a celebration of surdity. At the end of her adventures, as Alice increasingly becomes the object of scrutiny, her growth becomes almost uncontrollable, becoming, at its extreme, a return to the world of the utterance or “utter” reality. The relationship between interior and exterior is therefore mediated by the figure of Alice in her desire to accommodate or be accommodated:

Still she went on growing, and, as a last resource, she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself, “Now I can do no more, whatever happens. What will become of me?”<sup>93</sup>

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90 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 78

91 Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll*, p. 96.

92 Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll*, pp. 212-13.

93 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, pp. 57-8

This is a sexualised desire — as the Duchess says, “The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours.”<sup>94</sup> A surdic erethism therefore infuses all utterances of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The underminedness of all the nonsense of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is a ludic, genital exhibitionism which, in a most extreme example of grotesque transformation, fuses object of desire with desire.

By contrast, the desire to achieve “utter” utterance in *The Waste Land*, a desire which ultimately resolves itself in surdity, is tied to a political agenda of a radical elitism. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* on the other hand, the desire is for the continuation of one surdic state leading to another surdic state, in a continual process of grotesque association. The seeming ease with which this occurs is comparable to the ingestive inclusiveness evident in Peacock’s *Gryll Grange*. The dominant figurations of desire in *The Waste Land* are characterised by a movement toward the cancellation of that desire. This movement from utterance to cancellation has its analogue in the underminedness of impotence, exemplified by the figure of Tiresias and of the maimed Fisher King. The movement from surdic state to surdic state in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* has its analogue in the underminedness of tumescence and detumescence in the form of Alice, and in other characters, such as the Queen of Hearts, a violent erethism that can only begin to struggle with other utterances in the often repeated “Off with her head.”

Another difference between these two late romantic menippean satires is also the degree to which the “System-subject” is presented as a moral imperative. For Eliot, the imperative to redefine, or fix the “ideal order” of which he writes, must always be undermined by the ludic semiosis implicit in that order. For Carroll, the desire for uninhibited play is grounded in the secure knowledge of knowledge as a series of ludic relations out of which appropriate sense can be made: as the Duchess says, “Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.”<sup>95</sup> In the half century which separates the two works, it is clear that the anxiety evident in Eliot’s work is of a different order to Carroll’s engagement with the System-subject. The enthymemic fragment for Carroll is a ludic site: contestation, in terms of utterance and surdity, is a sexualised game that has its expression in the prolongation of arousal and the deferral of the orgasmic moment. The enthymemic fragment for Eliot is a source of anxiety: one in which the utterances of the dead are invited to predominate, but fall back into a

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94 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 122

95 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 121

despairing surdity. The potentially ludic moment of arousal must lead to a cancellation: otherwise the orgasmic moment of the consummation, or explosion, of an ideal order would be vulnerable in a way that the impotent figure is not.

There is also a sense in which *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is centred upon an elaborate and unusually playful *nekya* as well. The entry of Alice into Wonderland is a downward, falling movement, in accord with the menippean tripartite universe in which the nether world is 'down there'. Gardner (after Empson) identifies a profusion of "death jokes" in *The Annotated Alice*, the first of which is her fear, while falling down the rabbit-hole, of dropping an empty jar of marmalade and killing someone underneath.<sup>96</sup> Subsequent to this, Alice is presented with a series of situations which are death jokes, the climax of which is the furious "Off with her head!" of the Queen of Hearts. One explanation for the prevalence of death jokes could be that the fusion of the 'netherworld' with Wonderland is analogous to the conflation of death with the moment of orgasm. Death jokes in this context therefore function as a kind of sublimated genital desire, an unleashing of the primordial state which is celebratory in much the same way as Epistemon's death and subsequent resuscitation by Panurge in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is signalled by a festive great household fart.<sup>97</sup>

If death represents an attaining to the primordial state, then there is also a concomitant exposure of the kind of fears that Ackroyd outlines in *T.S. Eliot: A Life*: fear of the feminine and of female sexuality.<sup>98</sup> These fears are manifested as yet another example of the enthymemic irony of the work, its hysteria. According to Wayne Koestenbaum, hysteria "implies a linguistic condition — muteness alternating with disorderly, imaginative speech — and a covert antagonism to patriarchy."<sup>99</sup> Koestenbaum's thesis is primarily concerned with the homoerotic aspects of male literary collaboration, and in the case of *The Waste Land*, a portrait of hysteria that resulted from the collaboration of Eliot and Pound. Most of Koestenbaum's observations are not

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96 Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, p. 5. Empson, in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, pp. 268-70 characterises the death jokes in the Alice books as indicative of the emergence from childhood into adulthood, although he tends to downplay the significance of the connection between emergent sexual awareness and death.

97 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p. 265

98 Ackroyd, Peter. *T.S. Eliot: A Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984. p. 310: "For a long period he seems to have been disturbed or disgusted by female sexuality, particularly as it was embodied in his wife."

99 Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, p. 112

relevant to this thesis, but his perception of the hysterical aspects of the poem add a psychoanalytic dimension to the irony of enthymemic structures in the work outlined above. For example, Tiresias is, for Koestenbaum, “the poem’s quintessential male hysteric — one of Freud’s ‘double flowers’ containing male and female parts.”<sup>100</sup> As has been already said, much of the work expresses an inability to speak, or a wish to speak “utterly” which resolves into surdity. The hysterical aspects of this surdity are significant, not only for the psychoanalytic aspects which have been documented by Ackroyd, but for a more complex response to (and fear of) the feminine that contrasts markedly with Carroll:

Thus when we focus not only on women’s increasingly successful struggle for autonomy in the years from, say, 1880 to 1920, but also on their increasingly successful production of literary texts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we find ourselves confronting an entirely different modernism. And it is a modernism constructed not just against the grain of Victorian male precursors, not just in the shadow of a shattered God, but as an integral part of a complex response to *female* precursors and contemporaries. Indeed, it is possible to hypothesise that a reaction-formation against the rise of literary women became not just a theme in modernist writing but a motive for modernism. Even the establishment of a supposedly anti-establishment avant garde can be seen as part of this phenomenon, for the twin strategies of excavation and innovation deployed in experimental works like *The Cantos* (1917-67), *The Waste Land*, and *Ulysses* reconstitutes the hierarchies implicit in what T.S. Eliot called in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” ‘the mind of Europe.’<sup>101</sup>

While the hysterical aspects of the *The Waste Land* are potentially antagonistic to patriarchy, they can equally be read as a misogynistic response to the literary empowerment of women writers in Eliot’s time. After all, in a letter to Conrad Aiken, Eliot referred to his recently published work as a woman’s “purulent offensive discharge.”<sup>102</sup>

The desire to break with a past, and yet preserve that moment of rupture in a never-ending *nekya* constitutes the central paradox of those late Romantic menippea that lie on the cusp of a departure from the Romantic era. The ludic evocation of the “System-

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100 Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, pp. 127-28

101 Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. p. 156.

102 Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, p. 125

subject” prefigures a more general ludism of representation and writing in general, which is both expressive of the dislocation of the modern subject and evocative of the liberating and enriching possibilities such ludic dislocations offer. The ludic *nekya* of late Romanticism is the ground from which a more thorough exploration of the struggle between surdity and utterance can take place in the modernist era.

# 6

## Grotesque Mimesis in Sir Thomas Urquhart's *The Jewel*: Fetishistic Self-Conscious Narration and the Anatomy

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yunker doodler wanked to wall awriting off his phoney.

— JAMES JOYCE, *Finnegans Wake*, p.464

### 1. Fetishistic Self-conscious Narration

In his article “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*”, Wayne C. Booth writes that

Sterne's achievement is in taking forces which had become more and more disruptive in comic fiction and synthesizing them, with the help of older modes, into a new kind of fictional whole.<sup>1</sup>

The forces which had become “more disruptive” are outlined by Booth as developing in the period spanning from the writing of *Don Quixote* through to Sterne's menippean satire. Writers in the intervening period discussed by Booth include Fielding, Marivaux, Goodall and Sarah Fielding, while the “older modes” include “Montaigne and Burton and Swift, and... the more obscure writers of ‘nonsense fiction’ or ‘facetiae’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all of whom wrote books with obviously “Shandean” qualities.”<sup>2</sup> For “Shandean” we can read “Menippean”, and it is in the figure of the self-conscious narrator that Booth is able to distinguish recent influences in comic fiction in Sterne's day from older “traditional” forms. While it can be argued, as Booth does, that *Tristram Shandy* represents the end-product of a continuity of development of self-conscious narration, it is also the case that *Tristram Shandy* can be seen to be a parody of the more paradoxical and absurd elements of self-conscious narration in preceding works.

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1 Booth, Wayne C. “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction Before *Tristram Shandy*”. *PMLA*, 1952 67:3 163–85. p.185

2 Booth, “The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction Before *Tristram Shandy*”, p.164

For example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* relies heavily on the notion of the simultaneity of writing with everyday experience, so that Pamela's letter writing must coincide or be contiguous with the events which are the concern of the letters. Pamela's letters are to her parents and catalogue her unhappiness and trepidation, and are also the means by which the story proceeds, with the result that they and the writing of them begin to take on a fetishistic importance. Mr. B—'s intense curiosity as to their contents and Pamela's reluctance to show him is overlaid with sexual implications: in fact, letter writing becomes a fetishistic act precisely because of Pamela's confinement by the predatory Mr. B—. However, this fetishism is not entirely a part of the self-consciousness of Pamela the narrator. Although the scene of writing nearly always figures prominently in her letters, fetishization of the scene of writing is only ever hinted at. For example, when writing to her parents of Mrs. Jewkes' foiling of her plans to run away:

Well, I thought, here are strange pains taken to ruin a poor innocent, helpless, and worthless young body.— This plot is laid too deep, and has been too long hatching, to be baffled, I fear.<sup>3</sup>

Here the sexual connotations of "plot" as hole, as well as stratagem (and narration) and even "hatching", as in the hatching of an egg, are articulated beyond the self-consciousness of Pamela. This is more apparent in the presentation of the character of Mr. B— and in the nature of his sexual advances. An example is where Mr. B—, having read previous letters to her parents, expresses the desire to read all future letters.

What is occurring here is the fetishization of the act of writing as a form of sexual play by Mr. B— himself, with no apparent concomitant awareness on Pamela's part:

"Why," said he, "tell me truly, have you not continued your account till now?" — "Don't ask me, Sir," said I.— "But I insist upon your answer," replied he.— "Why, then, Sir, I will not tell an untruth; I have." — "That's my good girl!" said he; "I love sincerity at my heart" — "In another, Sir," said I, "I presume you mean!" — "Well," said he, "I'll allow you to be a little witty upon me; because it is *in you*, and you cannot help it; but you will greatly oblige me, to show me voluntarily what you have written. I long to see the particulars of your plot, [!] and your disappointment, where your papers leave off: for you have so beautiful a manner that it is partly that, and partly my love for you, that has made me desirous of reading all you write; though a great deal of it is against myself; for which you must expect to suffer a little; and as I have

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3 Richardson, Samuel. *Pamela*, Vol. 1. London: Dent, 1957. p.91

furnished you with the subject, I have a title to see the fruit of your pen. Besides," said he, "there is such a pretty air of romance in *your* plots, and *my* plots, that I shall be better directed in what manner to wind up the catastrophe of the pretty novel."<sup>4</sup>

The metaphors of writing here tend towards the agricultural, which with its overtones of fertility is highly sexualised: plot as interiority; as furrow to be sown or ploughed; as wily stratagem to achieve intercourse, even rape. Yet this metaphoricity remains below the consciousness of Pamela — it is not engaged with in the way that Sterne does in *Tristram Shandy* nineteen years later, where the self-consciousness of the narrator is inextricably tied to a fetishistic, ludic metaphoricity of the scene of writing itself. On a more subtle level, Sterne parodies the claims made for the anteriority of speech to writing in Pamela's letters which purport to be "traces" of her "real" experience. The simultaneity of experience and writing become a paradoxical supplementarity in much of Sterne's work and a rich source of humour.

This supplementarity is, as Derrida argues, intrinsic to the nature of writing itself. Discussing representation and presence Derrida writes

For the concept of the supplement — which here determines that of the representative image — harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, technè, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. ... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence.<sup>5</sup>

Self-conscious narration, particularly in comic modes, opens up the possibility of this notion of supplementarity, most notably in terms of the inseparability of the two significations of the supplement. Whereas one of the tasks Deconstruction sets itself is to confirm that "each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly [sic.] vague in the presence of the other"<sup>6</sup>, self-conscious narration in menippean satire tends to set the different significations of the supplement into play. Moreover, as will be argued later, the fetishization of one or other of the significations

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4 Richardson, *Pamela*, pp.204-5

5 Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. pp.144-145

6 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.145

of the supplement is a gesture which, by exposing its supplementarity, exposes the play of representation.

The self-conscious narrator has been a particularly strong feature of menippean writing since at least the time of Varro. His menippean satire *Bimarcus* appears to have its narrator engaging his other self in dialogue as he writes, arguing whether or not one should write in tropes.<sup>7</sup> Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* displays strong elements of a self-conscious narrator, as does Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller* in which Jack Wilton interrupts his narration to gloat at his success in fooling a member of his company, remarking "here let me triumph a while and ruminate a line or two on the excellence of my wit."<sup>8</sup> In fact, the list of menippean self-conscious narrators is too long to be enumerated, but as with all lists, it anatomizes and it distinguishes fetishistic self-conscious narration from mere reflexivity of narration. In *Tristram Shandy*, the scene of writing itself is fetishized and the sexualized possibilities which ensue from this differ markedly from the 'interventionist' narrator who does not reflect upon the pleasure such intervention yields. For example, in Volume III, Chapter XXVIII of *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram narrates:

I enter upon this part of the story in the most pensive and melancholy frame of mind, that ever sympathetic breast was touched with. — My nerves relax as I tell it. — Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse, and of that careless alacrity with it, which every day of my life prompts me to say and write a thousand things I should not. — And this moment that I last dipp'd my pen into my ink, I could not help taking notice what a cautious air of sad composure and solemnity there appear'd in my manner of doing it. — Lord! how different from the rash jerks, and hare-brain'd squirts thou art wont, *Tristram!* to transact it with in other humours, — dropping thy pen, — spurting thy ink about thy table and thy books, — as if thy pen and thy ink, thy books and thy furniture cost thee nothing.<sup>9</sup>

Here the process of narration is referred to by Tristram as a masturbatory frenzy. The depiction of narration refers us back to the scene of writing, to the act of dipping the quill and to the causal connection between sitting down to write, while simultaneously reflecting upon it, and writing. Just as Derrida writes of "the supplement [as that]

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7 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.117; Kristeva, *Desire and Language*, p.83, Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", p.56.

8 Nashe, "The Unfortunate Traveller" in Salzman, Paul [ed], *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.223

9 Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, pp.170-171

which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude [and] is equally that which compensates for a lack"<sup>10</sup>, there is also a sense in which fetishistic self-conscious narration posits itself as supplemental to reality, completing the world, and yet also onanistically gratuitous, a turning away from everyday life.

Between the two supplemental aspects of narration opens up a play of *differance*, to pursue the Derridean supplementarity suggested above. In "Freud and the Scene of Writing" Derrida dwells upon Freud's concept of the "mystic writing-pad", a child's writing toy which Freud intended as an illustration of how he figured consciousness to be. Derrida writes that "through the insistence of his metaphoric investment he makes what we believe we know under the name of writing enigmatic"; that instead of "writing" being evoked as an image or a metaphor to "illustrate the relationship between reason and experience, perception and memory," it is 'interrupted' by Freud's insistence on the metaphor of the "mystic writing pad", a "gesture sketched out by Freud [that] interrupts that assurance and opens up a new kind of question about metaphor, writing and spacing in general."<sup>11</sup> In a sense, metaphoricity of writing will always interrupt that which writing intends to present, and the resulting tendency towards fetishization evident in a menippean satire such as *Tristram Shandy* also reveals the implication of gratuitousness or excess in the play of representation itself.

When Derrida argues that the "trace as memory is... the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches"<sup>12</sup> — it is precisely this "trace", this enigmatic gap between writing as what is presented for reading and writing as fetishized object, considered together with these two, supplementary aspects of writing that constitutes what could be termed a "grotesque mimesis", an absolute representation as well as, and necessarily, an absolute gratuity. The idea of "grotesque mimesis" will be expanded upon further in the next section, but for the time being it could be thought of as constituting a way of thinking about menippean satire that takes into account its history as a subversive genre. Grotesque mimesis as an absolute gratuity is at odds with various critical traditions that wish to recuperate normative satire from menippean satire or seek an understanding of the work as representation rather than as a play of

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10 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.212

11 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.199

12 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.201

representation. It would appear that the thinking of this play has been a significant obstacle in the thinking of menippean satire as a genre in its own terms.

The playfulness of fetishistic self-conscious narration in menippean satire is also a characteristic of the parody of writing which constitutes such writing. Primarily, this parody operates upon the notion of the mind or sensibility as the origin of writing, or of presence itself. Instead, the *differance* which defers presence and according to Derrida is “not an essence, as it is not anything”<sup>13</sup> is also that which “constitutes the essence of life.”<sup>14</sup> Leaving to one side the question of whether Derrida is psychologizing the trace or is engaging in a transcendental project, the extent to which *differance* is “originary” is also the extent to which it is not a “thing” and must be considered “under erasure” a “non-origin which is originary.”<sup>15</sup> Arguing by analogy, fetishistic self-conscious narration is such an originary non-origin — gratuitously simultaneous with itself, preceding and exceeding its own production. More importantly, such gratuitousness, or supplementarity, is fetishized — as is the scene of writing — with the result that such writing can be viewed as a fetishistic *differance* in terms of the gratuitous “real life” of the text.

This complex of fetishization, mimesis and menippean satire opens up a field of inquiry best served by examination of a text where consideration of language and writing itself is the *raison d'être* of the work. Such a work is *The Jewel*, by Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, the first translator of Rabelais.<sup>16</sup> First published in 1652, its full title was “EKΣKYBAAAYPON: Or, The Discovery of a Most exquisite Jewel, more precious than diamonds inched in gold, the like whereof was never seen in any age; found in the kennel of Worcester-Streets, the day after the fight, and six before the Autumnal Æquinox, anno 1651.” The book contains an outline of a proposed universal language, which is the ostensible Jewel of the title. The work is introduced and “edited” by one Christianus Presbyteromastix (literally, “Christian

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13 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.203

14 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.203

15 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.203

16 Urquhart’s deep familiarity with Rabelais is of particular importance in the consideration of *The Jewel* as a menippean satire. Holland has noted that “The first to translate [Rabelais], Sir Thomas Urquhart, may himself have been led by Rabelais’ example to write learned satire.” Holland, “Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English.” p.144.

presbyter-beater”) and contains what are supposed to be a small fragment of Urquhart’s papers found after the Battle of Worcester.

In their introduction to *The Jewel*, Jack and Lyall note that it is “a work which in its apparent formlessness, its movement from one mode to another, its exuberant wordiness and its seemingly contradictory comments on literary method resolutely defies any attempt at generic classification.”<sup>17</sup> The impossibility of any generic classification is, of course, a tell-tale indicator of the menippea. *The Jewel* begins with a list of the “names of the chiefs of the name of Urquhart and of their primitive fathers, as by authentick records and traditions they were from time to time, through the various generations of that family successively conveyed till the present yeer 1652”<sup>18</sup> as well as a corresponding list of mothers, with the fathers’ list beginning with Adam I and the mothers’ with Eva. The work then begins with an account of Urquhart’s involvement in the Battle of Worcester and his subsequent imprisonment. There follows a summary of the “Jewel”, Urquhart’s outline for a universal language, which, he promises

wherein whatever is uttered in other languages hath signification in it, whilst it affordeth expressions both for copiousness, variety and conciseness in all manner of subjects, which no language else is able to reach unto: most fit for such as would with ease attaine to a most expedite facility of expressing themselves in all the learned sciences, faculties, arts, disciplines, mechanick trades and all other discourses whatsoever, whether serious or recreative.<sup>19</sup>

Urquhart is at great pains to stress, however, that “with the favour of a little time he could do much therein; but unless he were sure to possess his own with freedom it would be impossible for him to accomplish a task of so great moment and laboriousness.”<sup>20</sup> On the one hand this may appear a cunning ploy to obtain release from prison, securing his freedom on trust. On the other hand, there are satirical overtones, whether intended or not, with the promise of a grand project which is subject to the vicissitudes of human fortune. For example, in his other work, *Logopandectison* (1653), “Urquhart claims that he cannot get on with the universal reform of learning until his creditors have been driven away, invectives against whom

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17 Jack and Lyall, Introduction to Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.17

18 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.55

19 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, pp.61-62.

20 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.61

consume the better part of the work. The idea of a universal logical language falls prey to human purposes and the private visions of a projector.”<sup>21</sup> *The Jewel* also reads as an encomium for Scotland, culminating in the episode of the Admirable Crichtoun, which is the part of Urquhart’s work that is most often anthologized.

As a projection for a universal language, *The Jewel* is not unique in the context of the seventeenth century. Although Leibniz is perhaps the best known projector of a universal language, he was anticipated not only by “Wilkins and Dalgarno, but also by Ward, Urquhart and Descartes”<sup>22</sup> as well as Cave Beck and Francis Lodwick, among many others.<sup>23</sup> Two things appear to set Urquhart apart from his peers: Jonathan Cohen notes that “Urquhart seems to have been the only seventeenth-century thinker who based his new language on phonograms”<sup>24</sup> while some others seem to locate a satirical edge in much of *The Jewel*.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Demott, for example sees that *The Jewel* functions mainly to “lampoon technical words,”<sup>26</sup> while Slaughter notes that “his universal language scheme is rather Rabelaisian in itself, the Epistle Dedicatorie addressed to ‘No-Bodie.’”<sup>27</sup> While it may well be the case that Urquhart had satirical intentions in mind, given his interest in the language of Rabelais,<sup>28</sup> it is clear that he was knowledgeable about developments in the universal language, although the source of this knowledge cannot be determined.<sup>29</sup> *The Jewel* therefore stands as a curious mixture of earnest learning and playful wit, a medley of forms and, presumable

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21 Holland, “Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English.” p.144

22 Cohen, Jonathan. “On the Project of a Universal Character,” in Subbiondo, Joseph L [ed]., *John Wilkins and Seventeenth Century British Linguistics*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992, p.248

23 Asbach-Schnitker, in Wilkins, John, *Mercury: Or the Secret Messenger*, Ed Brigitte Asbach-Schnitker, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984, p.xv

24 Cohen, “On the Project of a Universal Character,” in Subbiondo (Ed.), *John Wilkins and Seventeenth-Century Linguistics*, p.243

25 Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends* (c.1852) talking of the “new chemical language” claims that: “The new chemical vocabulary with all its philosophical ingenuity, is constructed on principles exactly similar to those which he [Urquhart] divulged more than a hundred years prior to its invention, in the preface of his Universal Language.” Willcock, John. *Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromartie*. Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1899. pp.180-81

26 Demott, Benjamin. “Wilkins’ Philosophical Language” in Subbiondo (Ed.), *John Wilkins and Seventeenth-Century Linguistics*, p.171

27 Slaughter, Mary M. *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. p.134

28 Asbach-Schnitker, in Wilkins, *Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger*, p.xxiii

29 Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century*, p.135

intentions, which leaves most critics wary as to how seriously they should take Urquhart's claims for a universal language.

The style of *The Jewel* is typical of the menippea: neologisms, portmanteau words, macaronics, mixed languages (and genres) and protracted sentences characterise what Jack and Lyall call the "highflown rhetoric" of the work. Holland has noted that

The nature of his two treatises *Ekskybalaaron* (1652) and *Logopandecteiſon, Introduction to the Universal Language* (1653) is not clear. What seems in them to be wit is so recherché that only their author, or one willing to undertake research on the universal language movement, is in a position to appreciate it. One who has done so writes that although some of Urquhart's proposals are sensible, 'there are elements that suggest at least partially satirical intention', [n] among them linguistic invention (or rather obscurantism) and an exaggerated pedantry that recalls Rabelais. [n.: Vivian Salmon, *The Works of Francis Lodwick*, London: 1972, p.28]<sup>30</sup>

In particular, the chronotope of *The Jewel* is the here and now of everyday time (although there is intermixed with this other chronotopes such as that particular to the encomium).<sup>31</sup> This here-and-nowness, which could be said to be a feature of the menippea<sup>32</sup> is also the defining feature of self-conscious narration. The here-and-nowness of *The Jewel* manifests itself in a fetishistic concern with the supplemental simultaneity of conception and execution, of writing and speech.

Thus my task increasing, and not being able to inlarge my time, for the cause aforesaid, I was necessitated to husband it the better, to over-triple my diligence and do the work by proportion of above three dayes in the space of one; wherefore laying aside al other businesses, and cooping my self up daily for some hours together betwixt the case and the printing press, I usually afforded the setter copy at the rate of above a whole printed sheet in the day, which (although by reason of the smallness of a pica letter and close couching thereof, it did amount to three full sheets of my writing) the aforesaid setter nevertheless, so nimble a workman he was, would in the space of 24 hours make dispatch of the whole and be ready for another sheet. He and I striving thus who should compose fastest, he with his hand and I with my brain; and his uncasing of the letters and placing them in the composing instrument, standing for my

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30 Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English." p.144

31 Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp.84-259

32 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.118

conception; and his plenishing of the gally and imposing of the form, encountering with the supposed equivaue of my writing, we would almost every foot so jump together in this joynt expedition and so nearly overtake other in our intended course, that I was oftentimes (to keep him doing) glad to tear off parcels of ten or twelve lines apeece and give him them, till more were ready; unto which he would so suddenly put an order that almost still before the ink of the written letters was dry their representatives were, out of their respective boxes, ranked in the composing-stick; by means of which great haste, I, writing but upon the loose sheets of cording quires, which (as I minced and tore them), looking like pieces of waste paper troublesome to get rallyed after such dispersive scatteredness, I had not the leisure to read what I had written till it came to a proof and sometimes to a full revise: so that, by vertue of this unanimous contest and joint emulation betwixt the theoretick and practical part, which of us should overhye other in celerity, we in the space of fourteen working-daies compleated this whole book, such as it is, from the first notion of the brain to the last motion of the press; and that without any other help on my side either of quick or dead, for books I had none nor possibly would I have made use of any, although I could have commanded them, then what (by the favour of God) my own judgment and fancy did suggest unto me; save so much as, by way of information, a servant of mine would now and then bring to me from some reduced officer of the primitive parliament, touching the proper names of some Scottish warriors abroad, which I was very apt to forget.<sup>33</sup>

Hand and brain are the key opposing motifs. The conception of the brain precedes the action of the press, “from the first notion of the brain to the last motion of the press.” However, the notion of the mimetic act as having its origin in a foreconception, or an ideality, tends to become submerged in the play of language itself. The “notion” of the brain and the “motion” of the press form a rhyming and rhythmic pattern that is emphasised elsewhere: “we would almost every foot so jump together in this joynt expedition and so nearly overtake other in our intended course.” That is, the temporal succession of events in one instance take on in another a supplementary nature such that each seems to vie for supremacy and antecedence. The process of printing threatens to subordinate the brain to its own ends, outstripping it and making it redundant.

In what Foucault calls the Classical episteme (a period into which *The Jewel* squarely falls), the “limit of knowledge would be the perfect transparency of representations to

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33 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, pp.52-53. I quote at length because the relative obscurity of Urquhart's work means that few people are familiar with the eccentricities of his style.

the sign by which they are ordered”<sup>34</sup> whereas perfect referentiality, here and elsewhere in *The Jewel*, tends to disappear into the competing, contrary notion that language has an ontogeny of which being and becoming supplant meaning and reference. This is an aspect of the logic of the menippea which Kristeva has commented on in *Desire and Language* where she writes

Menippean discourse is thus structured as ambivalence, as the focus for two tendencies of Western literature: representation through language as staging, and exploration of language as a correlative system of signs. Language in the Menippean tradition is both representation of exterior space and ‘an experience that produces its own sphere.’<sup>35</sup>

Even Sterne’s equation of writing with masturbation gives the language of writing the status of a sublimated act of intercourse. The transparency of representation and referentiality is continually obscured by its equation with the bodily. Freud notes in the conclusion to his “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad” (1925) that

If we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-pad while another periodically raises the covering-sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind.<sup>36</sup>

This implies an understanding that writing is a two-handed process, whatever it is that we imagine the other hand to be doing. In the case of *Tristram Shandy*, the “two-handedness” of the self-conscious narration has a fetishism that is onanistic, and leads to the theme of masturbation in menippean satire and comic fiction generally. Before this can be explored further, however, it is necessary to return to the notion of a “grotesque mimesis” and its relation to the comic tradition and fetishistic narration/writing.

## 2. Grotesque Mimesis

Mimesis has been one of the touchstones of western literary criticism since the time of Plato. Generally it is taken to mean “imitation”, although the retention of the Greek noun in the critical idiom, and its incorporation into the English language (most

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34 Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1971. p.76

35 Kristeva, *Desire and Language*, p.84

36 Freud, Sigmund. “Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad” in *The Complete Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud, Vol. XIX 1923-1926 *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*,. London: Hogarth, 1961, p.232

dictionaries list the word without italics) indicate that its other generally accepted meaning, “artistic representation” is equally as important. While the history of concepts associated with or derived from mimesis is too vast an undertaking to attempt here, it is not a specious generalisation to claim that the place of mimesis as imitation or representation in the critical idiom is generally unchallenged. An example of this is the tendency of many theorists to use mimesis in binary oppositions such as the Aristotelian distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis* as the difference between showing and telling. Even Auerbach’s monumental study of representation in the western tradition, imposingly titled *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tends toward formulating mimesis in terms of an opposition, beginning with the difference between Biblical and Homeric representation.<sup>37</sup> According to Melberg, Auerbach’s distinction of Homer/Bible is a kind of repetition of Schiller’s opposition between ‘naive’ (pre-modern) and ‘sentimental’ (modern) *Dichtung* (composition). This opposition is, in turn

a repetition of many efforts to separate the old from the new, the oral from the written, the epos from the novel.... This way of thinking is actually derived from Platonic dialectics, although Plato himself used his poetical pharmaceuticals — *mimesis*, repetition, *mania*, dialogical writing — in a more playful and unpredictable way than his Platonist followers.<sup>38</sup>

This is not to suggest, of course, that such oppositional formulations are oversimplifications. Rather, the point is that the tendency towards systematisation of critical terms such as mimesis often assumes that the meaning of mimesis is exhausted by its definition as ‘imitation’ or ‘representation’.

What I want to argue here is that a re-examination of mimesis can yield a richer understanding of literary artistic activity, particularly in relation to a genre as difficult to conceptualise as the menippea. For the purposes of this thesis it is important to distinguish between the *theorisation of mimesis* and the *thinking of mimesis*. Examples of theorisations of mimesis include their occurrence in Plato and Aristotle, Xenophon, Augustine, Sidney, Lessing, Kant, Burke, Heidegger and others too numerous to mention. The tradition of western analytic philosophy has usually taken these theorisations to be part of a system, particularly in the case of Plato. When Plato

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37 Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp.3-23

38 Melberg, Arne. *Theories of Mimesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. p.43

has the poets expelled from his ideal city in Book X of *The Republic*, for example, the theorisations of mimesis which follow are inextricably caught up with the notions of *noumena* and *phenomena* that are crucial to the Platonic system. The forms in which Plato supposedly offers theorisations of mimesis are, however, literary forms, and are themselves evidence of a mimetic practice, it can be argued, that is not commensurate with the theorisations of mimesis offered in the same text. For example, Plato's dialogues are created *dia mimesos* (dramatized narration), the same practice for which Homer is criticized by Socrates/Plato.<sup>39</sup> There is therefore present in Plato a *thinking* of mimesis which differs from his *theorisations* of mimesis. Realising this distinction should not be seen as a dichotomy between form and content or between *logos* and *lexeos* (the *what* and *how* of a text), but as a way of approaching the complexity of mimesis, the thinking of which is *already there* in any literary text.

If origins count for anything, the work of G.F. Else on mimesis offers an insight into what meaning mimesis and the group of words to which it belongs may once have had for the Greeks. Sörbom, after Else, notes that

What we have found in the fifth century is not a theory but a bundle of interrelated, concrete word-usages. True to its parentage, *mimeisthai* seems to denote originally a 'miming' or mimicking of a person or animal by means of voice and/or gesture. Often, but not invariably, the medium is music and dancing; in any case the essential idea is the rendering of a characteristic look, action, or sound through human means.<sup>40</sup>

The earliest usages of words belonging to the *mimeisthai*-group would appear to have a richness beside which the thinking of mimesis as imitation of another person in general, doing as or what he does, is a relatively colourless idea. Further, it would appear that *mimeisthai* and other words from the group were originally coined as metaphor, but subsequent usage wore out the metaphor and the "metaphorical sense faded away."<sup>41</sup>

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39 Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*, pp.35-36.

40 Sörbom, Göran. *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary*. Bonniers: Svenska Bokförlaget, 1966. pp.18-19. Later, (p.37) Sörbom explains the *mimeisthai*-group of Greek words. It includes *mimesis* (noun), *mimema* (end product of mimesis) and *mimetes* (persons performing the activity of *mimesis*), which derive from the verb *mimeisthai*, which in turn derives from *mimos* (meaning "mime actor" or the dramatic genre "mime").

41 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.19

A full discussion of the significance of earlier usages of mimesis is not relevant to this thesis but a number of points can be summarised from Sörbom's work. The connection between the mime and the meaning of the *mimeisthai*-group has particular resonance for the relation between mimesis and menippean satire. The mime was essentially a dramatic activity that belonged to the secular world of the banquet (or symposium) and employed subject-matter chosen from "low life", akin to the slum naturalism that Bakhtin lists as characteristic of the menippea and the carnivalesque in general.<sup>42</sup> The distinction between the style, or manner of representation, and the subject-matter itself need not necessarily be commensurate. In the mime, the object was not so much portraiture, but the representation of something more general such as a "coward in battle, or of a man stealing cows."<sup>43</sup>

On the one hand, the connections between the "low life" of the mime and the *mimeisthai*-group and the metaphorical nature of the meaning of mimesis, seems to have given the term a dubious connotation, such that the verb *mimeisthai*, according to Sörbom, originally meant "to behave as people do in the mimes."<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the connection between the mime and the thinking of mimesis is that "in producing the mime there need not necessarily be one particular phenomenon that serves as model."<sup>45</sup> If this is the case, then the thinking of mimesis need not be constrained by notions of verisimilitude to a thing, but rather can be thought of in terms of characterising similarities (and differences), with the result that notions of "truthfulness to the model" vanish.<sup>46</sup> By recovering these nuances in the earlier meanings of mimesis, it is possible to begin to consider a reevaluation of the term which would allow the evaluation of the role of mimesis in menippean satire to proceed unencumbered by teleological limitations of "truthfulness to the model" and representational verisimilitude.

The recent work of Arne Melberg develops in this direction. In his *Theories of Mimesis*, Melberg proposes a reevaluation of the traditional theories of mimesis on the basis of the difference that is inescapably a part of any imitation or similitude. That is,

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42 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.23; Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.115

43 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.25

44 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.38

45 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.26

46 Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, p.29

for any representational likeness or similitude, there must also be movements of difference and as a consequence

*Mimesis* is never a homogeneous term, and if its basic movement is towards similarity it is always open to the opposite.<sup>47</sup>

It is no coincidence that Melberg develops this idea with reference to some thinkers and writers who have an unquestionably menippean pedigree: Plato, Cervantes, Kierkegaard and Derrida.<sup>48</sup> The complex ambivalence of *Fear and Trembling*, or *The Post Card* or the *Phaedrus*, for instance, foregrounds the heterogeneous, and often contrary, thinking of mimesis that is characteristic of these works. While Melberg's sensitivity to such ambivalence allows him to pursue the contrary aspects of mimesis and develop a general, historicized reading of mimesis as repetition, he also demonstrates an awareness of a shared generic affiliation in the texts he considers. In particular, he is aware of the "drastic consequences" that Derrida's introduction of fiction into language has, so that "all text becomes versions of fiction."

Some possible consequences have been demonstrated not least in Derrida's own writing, which has become as difficult to situate in established genres (for instance, "philosophy") as Kierkegaard's or Plato.<sup>49</sup>

The "difficulty" of such genre identification cannot be entirely separated from the "difficulty" of the thinking of mimesis which characterises those works.

In the tradition of the grotesque, the thinking of mimesis itself represents another kind of grotesque. Inasmuch as there is a movement of similarity in representation, there is also in the 'movements of difference' the possibility for various thinkings of mimesis that open up radically different fields of inquiry. One of these is the inescapably bodily nature of mimesis. A return to the origins of mimesis as *mimēsthai* is also a return to not just a verb, or a metaphorical process, but also an *activity*. In a sense it is impossible to think of mimesis apart from the bodily activity which brings it into play, be it the scene of writing, or the manipulation of media. From the point of view of a 'grotesque mimesis' it is possible to conceive of imitation and difference not just on the level of the concept, but on a level which includes bodily differences: the 'difference' between that which is bodily and that which is conceptual, the 'trace' of the body perhaps (bodily traces), the incommensurability of medium to thing

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47 Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*, p.3

48 For discussion of Plato, Derrida and Kierkegaard as menippeans see the next chapter. For a discussion of *Don Quixote* as menippean satire, see Chapter One.

49 Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*, p.171

represented, the incommensurability of words to actions and things (and at the same time, their perfect suitability because, whether we like it or not, they do represent and, in a sense, imitate).

Such a thinking of mimesis leaves unresolved a complex of potentialities that does not fully restrict the purview it offers. Rather, it enables us to consider fully the mimetic aspects of a form as radically disjunctive, yet *anatomical*, as the menippea.

### 3. Masturbation and Mimesis: “That Dangerous Supplement”

A recurring motif in menippean satire is of the author or narrator as a bumbling, incompetent fool:

A writer is his own dupe, and at the very moment he fools other people he also fools himself.<sup>50</sup>

In one man’s hands [learning] is a sceptre, in another’s a fool’s bauble.<sup>51</sup>

The figure of the fool is often seen with a sceptre, part of the inversion of authority figures. The fool’s sceptre, in its function as a parody of symbols of authority, has a phallic character, with the inevitable proviso that this grotesque transformation is accompanied by an exchange whereby the ludic play of the “detachable penis” is supplemented by a sexual diminishment: an emasculation (real or symbolic), impotence or dysfunction. (There is also a sense in which the grotesque figure of the fool is overly functional or priapistic. This constitutes an extension of the same logic of supplementarity as it pertains to play.) The literary clown is often depicted in a similar way with the quill or pen as a displaced (and grotesquely transformed) penis and ink as semen. Examples abound in the menippea, particularly in the topos of the self-conscious narrator, who, considered in the context of the fetishization of that narrator becomes very much like the figure of an idiot compulsively masturbating.

An early example of this topos of masturbatory narration occurs in Petronius’ *Satyricon*, where Encolpius indulges in “self-abuse” of a kind after having been shamed by his impotence in an erotic encounter with “Circe” in the Croton fragment. This abuse takes the form of a stern lecture he delivers to his recalcitrant member:

Once this vile abuse was finished, I too began to feel regret — for talking like this — and I blushed inwardly at forgetting my sense of shame and

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50 Blanchot, Maurice. *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Essays*. Trans. Lydia Davis. Ed P. Adams Sitney. Barrytown NY: Station Hill Press, 1981. p.29

51 Montaigne, *Essays*, p.292

bandying words with a part of the body that more dignified people do not even think about. Then after rubbing my brow for some time, I said to myself: 'Still, where's the harm in relieving my feelings by some natural abuse? Anyway, how is it we curse such parts of the body as the stomach or the throat and even the head, when we have the occasional headache? In fact, didn't Ulysses argue with his heart, and don't some tragic heroes abuse their eyes as though they could hear them? People with gout curse their feet, people with arthritis their hands, people with ophthalmia their eyes, and when people stub their toes, they often blame the pain on their feet.

Cato frowns and knits his brows,  
The Censor wants to stop us,  
The Censor hates my guileless prose,  
My simple modern opus.  
My cheerful modern opus.  
My cheerful unaffected style  
Is Everyman when in his humour,  
My candid pen narrates his joys,  
Refusing to philosophize.  
Find me any man who knows  
Nothing of love and naked pleasure.  
What stern moralist would oppose  
Two bodies warming a bed together?  
Father of Truth, old Epicurus  
Spoke of bodies, not of soul,  
And taught, philosophers assure us,  
Love is Life's sovereign goal.  
There is nothing on earth more misleading than silly prejudice and  
nothing sillier than hypocritical moralizing.<sup>52</sup>

In this complex passage much can be made of the play of "abuse" but the figure of the narrator berating his penis, even throttling it in anger for not performing, is paradoxical and comic. The resolution to this argument undercuts any possible normative meaning that could be gained from the passage: even Epicurus' arguments are dismissed as "hypocritical moralizing" as much as Encolpius' own "silly prejudice." Yet despite all the mock-masturbation, there is a certain fetishizing of the complex of the scene of writing and the scene of "abuse" with the lines "My candid pen narrates his joys/ Refusing to philosophize." This suggests a transference of the functionality of the genitals into the act of writing, another grotesque transformation in the construction of a grotesque mimesis.

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52 Petronius, *Satyricon*, pp.148-49

In another ancient menippean satire, the *Paraenesis Didascalica* of Ennodius, the figure of the narrator as an incompetent scholar confesses that

My illustrious seeds,  
take these words  
from a dry father.  
That is well said  
which points to the truth.<sup>53</sup>

As Relihan notes, “Ambrose and Beatus [to whom the work is addressed] are thought of as children cheated of paternal instruction; Ennodius is the dry father, incapable of procreation.”<sup>54</sup> Again, the figure of sterility is supplemented by the existence of the work itself. The figure of the masturbating narrator meshes with impotence and sterility as a figure of the gratuity of mimesis.

The notion of fetishistic self-conscious narration can therefore be extended to the scene of writing in general. In her book *Volatile Bodies*, Liz Grosz quotes Philip Schilder on the body:

objects which were once connected with the body always retain something of the quality of the body-image in them. I have specifically pointed out the fact that whatever originates in or emanates out of our body will still retain a part of the body-image. The voice, the breath, the odour, faeces, menstrual blood, urine, semen, are still parts of the body image even when separated from the body.<sup>55</sup>

Whereas the figure of the masturbating narrator has a fairly direct connection with a thinking of mimesis that accedes to gratuitousness, the notion that “whatever originates or emanates out of our body” still retains a part of our body-image is useful for considering the figure of the impotent narrator as a part of this fetishistic self-consciousness. When the narrator of a menippean satire, or a central character, as with Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, is impotent, it is usually posited as a comic diminishment that is also an underpinning of the anatomical tendency of these works (an anatomization that often works through enthymemic fragmentation). These two different aspects of the sexual persona of the narrator — masturbating idiot or emasculated, impotent fool accord with the same supplementary logic of fetishistic self-conscious narration.

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53 Ennodius, cited in Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p.219

54 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p.167

55 Schilder, cited in Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, p.81:

In recent years this idea has received its most extended examination in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. In the section "That Dangerous Supplement", Derrida quotes Rousseau from his *Confessions* at length: "In a word, between myself and the most passionate of lovers there was only one, but that an essential, point of distinction, which makes my condition almost unintelligible and inconceivable."<sup>56</sup> This point of distinction is of great interest to Derrida and he lends the following extract from the *Confessions* a certain paradigmatic importance:

I had returned from Italy not quite the same as I had entered it, but as, perhaps, no one of my age had ever returned from it. I had brought back, not my virginity but my *puelage*. I had felt the progress of years; my restless temperament had at last made itself felt, and its first outbreak, quite involuntary, had caused me alarm about my health in a manner which shows better than anything else the innocence in which I had lived up to that time. Soon reassured, I learned that dangerous means of assisting it [*ce dangereux supplément*], which cheats Nature and saves up for young men of my temperament many forms of excess at the expense of their health, strength and, sometimes, their life (*Pléiade*, I pp.108-09 [p.111]).<sup>57</sup>

Derrida then explores the relation between the imaginary that substitutes itself for the real, this "dangerous" supplementation:

And indeed it is a question of the imaginary. The supplement that "cheats" maternal "nature" operates as writing, and as writing it is dangerous to life. This danger is that of the image. Just as writing opens the crisis of the living speech in terms of its "image" its painting or its representation, so onanism announces the ruin of vitality in terms of imaginary seductions.<sup>58</sup>

The link between masturbation and mimesis is one therefore that implicates itself in the logic of the supplementarity of writing. That is, it leads away from nature as much as it is a natural act of the self — "like the sign it bypasses the presence of the thing and the duration of being."<sup>59</sup> In the context of comic writing, the fetishistic nature of this supplementary relation presumes a metaphysics that opposes the world of forms with the world of the festive body. As simple a feature as the list is ample demonstration.

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56 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.150

57 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.150

58 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.151

59 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.151

#### 4. Rhytopography and the List

Keith Hopper has noted in his book on Flann O'Brien that

Constructing lists is itself a common and useful metaleptic device in metafiction, as any list draws attention to its incompleteness and is a hopeless struggle to classify and decode the flux of the infinite range of names available.<sup>60</sup>

While he may be correct in identifying the list as a feature of metafiction, or even self-conscious narration in general, the list is most apparent as one of the key indicators of the presence of menippean satire. To a large extent the list in menippean satire is exploited as an anatomizing farrago. But as much as the list is a totalizing attempt to encapsulate the world, it also signals incompleteness. In fact, the simultaneity of encyclopaedic attempts to encapsulate the world, with the fragmentary, incomplete and even arbitrary aspects of the list exposes, in this generic context at least, the absurdity of a thinking of mimesis in terms of imitation alone. As much as the list increases its claims to verisimilitude by its expansive scope, it diminishes these claims at the same time by its ordering, by its arbitrariness and by the internal resonances its structuring evokes.

The list is typical of the rhytopographic tendency of menippean satire: mere listing itself has a tendency to be satirical, even when understated. Rhytopography or rhytoparography is the concatenation of low and sordid things, deriving from the Greek word *rhytoparos* meaning filthy. It is often confused with rhytopography, or images of insignificant objects, odds and ends, deriving from the Greek word *rhytopos*, meaning petty wares, although the two may be indistinguishable. The terms both derive from Greek descriptions of art. As Colie writes

In Greek, what we call still life was first called by the word used to describe one aspect of the paradoxist's operation, rhytopography, the depiction of insignificant objects, of odds and ends.... As Dr. Sterling tells us, the genre 'was mockingly baptized rhytopography (i.e., painting of the sordid),' in recognition that the genre deliberately flaunted high classical ideals of art.<sup>61</sup>

Rhytopography is a technique of the grotesque, adumbrating the heterogeneous plurality of the world(s) through detailing inconsequentiality.

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60 Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*, pp.121-22.

61 Colie, Rosalie. *Paradoxia Epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*. Hamden Ct.: Archon Books, 1976, p.276

Initially rhyppography was limited in literature to the paradoxical encomium: the deliberate praise of something which paradoxically deserved no mention. Examples apart from Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* include Synesius' *Praise of Baldness*, Donne's "The Flea", Lucian's *The Praise of the Fly*, Portus' *De Nihilis Antiquitate* (one of many contained in Dornavius' *Amphitheatre*) and Melanchthon on the Ant (*Laus Formicae*).<sup>62</sup>

Rhyppography is also a significant recurring feature of menippean satire apart from its manifestation as the list. Rabelais describes himself as a "Puny Riparographer, or Riffraff-scribler of the sect of Pyrrhicus"<sup>63</sup> although Cohen does not follow Urquhart's translation but renders the same passage as "puny vegetable painter, a minor turnip-draughtsman of the school of Pyreicus."<sup>64</sup> Rabelais' particular form of rhyppography is not restricted to the scatological or obscene: it is a fundamental feature of the list and the neologism. As Colie notes

More than one student has been driven to the brink of despair by the abundance of Rabelais' neologisms, so many of which have still escaped, so rhyppological are their portmanteaux, confinement in dictionaries.<sup>65</sup>

The portmanteau word and the neologism are both, in a sense, rhyppographical. The 'novelty' of both suggests a grotesque play or an innovation that smacks of facetiousness, such as Urquhart's numerous inventions in *The Jewel*. But the neologism is not merely the residue of linguistic play. Any neologism is also characterised by the difficulty of its relation to its origin: that somehow the moment of coining brings a difficulty to the utterance that was not there, a difficulty that maps out concepts, relations and traces that have only come together in the moment of the neologism. This difficulty could become serious in the hands of a Derrida, where words like *differance*, parergonality, phallogocentrism, logocentrism or iterability are often taken to be the imperative for the moment of the neologism. But considered together, they become both more than a catalogue of difficult ideas and more than a collection of nonsense words. In a sense they are a rhyppography: but a rhyppography

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62 See Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, pp.3-37; 93-110; Geraldine, Sister M., C.S.J. "Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox. *Studies in Philology*, 1964 61 41-63; Miller, Henry Knight. "The Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to its Vogue in England, 1600-1800". *Modern Philology*, 1956 53:3 145-178. See also Chapter Seven for a more exhaustive list

63 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Urquhart, p.687

64 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p.605

65 Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p.65

of ideas, language and philosophy and of the inconsequentiality of the words themselves.

The grotesque technique of rhyppography draws attention to itself. As the list, for example, a self-referentiality creeps into rhyppography the more the list elaborates itself. This self-referentiality is shared by visual rhyppography, the still life. The stories of Zeuxis' paintings fooling nature are well enough known and demonstrate this aspect of rhyppography:

The still life seeks to transcend its medium in a curious way: by drawing attention to its craft, it flaunts its illusionism, its technical trickery. In this action, still life is an overt commentary on the art of painting, a kind of self reference.<sup>66</sup>

Rhyppography is therefore yet another example of the self-conscious, even fetishistic aspects of narration in menippean satire.

A good example of rhyppography as it is presented in the form of the list is Georges Perec's *Things*. The novel details the bourgeois lifestyle of a young Parisian couple who belong to a set of aspiring French students in love with materialism:

They would sit facing each other, they were going to eat after having been hungry, and all these things — the thick white tablecloth, the blue blot of a packet of *Gitanes*, the earthenware plates, the rather heavy cutlery, the stem glasses, the wicker basket full of newly baked bread — constituted the ever-fresh setting of an almost visceral pleasure, a pleasure so intense as to verge on numbness: an impression, almost exactly opposite and almost exactly identical to the experience of speed, of a tremendous stability, of tremendous plenitude. From this table set for dinner arose for them the feeling of perfect synchrony: they were in tune with the world, they were swimming in it, in their element, with nothing to fear from it.<sup>67</sup>

In this passage the listing of objects tends toward synecdoche. That is, as a succession of seemingly insignificant objects is enumerated, there is a supplemental accumulation of signs, the heterogeneous incompleteness of which seems to stand in place of an unfinalisable whole. There is also a tendency of the sign to concatenate with its manifold others in a digressive chain which blurs into a deliquescent harmony. The precipitancy of this signifying process is necessary for the numbing sensation of

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66 Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p.276

67 Perec, Georges. *Things: A Story of the Sixties AND A Man Asleep*. Trans. David Bellos and Andrew Leak. Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1990. p.59

“stability” and the almost “visceral” pleasure which accompanies it. In menippean satire the fluidity of rhyppography often paradoxically accretes into an anatomizing sense of wholeness — but it is a wholeness comprised of a heterogeneous “otherness” that is inimical to such monistic tendencies. The incompleteness of the taxonomical project is a motif of contingency and satirizes final ends. The anatomy of whales in *Moby Dick* exposes this contingency and also celebrates it:

Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word. But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught — nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!<sup>68</sup>

The satirical tendency of rhyppography extends beyond the contraries of incompleteness and encyclopaedism. Rhyppography draws attention to the text as object, as Hopper notes:

Despite its formal attempt at structuring and cataloguing, the list has no subordination of order and in the end is anti-hierarchical and hopelessly arbitrary... the topographical design of the list usurps normative reading codes, and in the process declares the materiality of the text as object.<sup>69</sup>

In this sense, the list has a fetishistic tendency, delimiting the text from the body only insofar as it becomes yet another object that can stand in the place of desire. In menippean satire in particular, the fetishistic aspect of the list is analogous to the fetishistic quality of self-conscious narration. In *The Jewel*, the two coincide with Urquhart’s ‘interruptions’ of his own list-making. At one point in the text Urquhart confesses

There is yet another Scotch colonel that served this King of Spain whose name is upon my tongue’s end and yet I cannot hit upon it. He was not a souldier bred, yet for many yeers together bore charge in Flanders under the command of Spinola...

Eight lines later, having described the man’s accomplishments, Urquhart confesses

It is strange my memory should so faile me, that I cannot remember his title. He was a lord, I know. Nay more, he was an earle! I, that he was,

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68 Melville, *Moby Dick*, p.157

69 Hopper, *Flann O’Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*, p.163

and one of the first of them. Ho now! Pescods on it! Crawford, Lodi Lindsay puts me in minde of him. It was the old Earl of Argile, this Marquis of Argile's father! That was he. That was the man, etc.<sup>70</sup>

The digressive interruption of his already digressive narrative heightens the self-conscious nature of the narration in an onanistic way. It draws attention to itself at the moment of interruption which is also, "Pescods", a moment of dissemination, an explosive moment of illumination which exposes and fetishizes the supplemental, simultaneous depiction of writing as conception.

## 5. The Admirable Urquhart

Urquhart's *The Jewel* not unexpectedly relies on lists, of varying forms, the first being the genealogical table that was originally produced in *A Peculiar Promptuary of Time* shortly before the publication of *The Jewel*. In some ways there are parallels which can be drawn with the genealogy of Pantagruel in Book II of Rabelais:

Porus — against whom Alexander the Great fought — who begat Aranthas, who begat Gabbara — who was the first inventor of drinking healths — who begat Goliath of Secundilla, who begat Offot — who had a terribly fine nose through drinking from the cask — who begat Artachaeus, who begat Oromedon, who begat Gemmagog — who was the inventor of pointed shoes — who begat Sisyphus, who begat the Titans, from whom sprang Hercules, who begat Enac — who was very expert at taking little worms out of the hands...<sup>71</sup>

In this parodic genealogy Pantagruel emerges as an ambivalent figure with a glorious but ridiculous heritage. In the case of Urquhart there is a similar ambivalence due to the improbable nature of Urquhart's inventive genealogy which extends back to Adam himself. Again, this reflects Urquhart's close involvement with Rabelais, but it would be wrong to see Urquhart as a slavish imitator of his great translation. One connection that can be made between this genetic preface and the linguistic and mathematical

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70 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.98. Korkowski's study of digression details several similar examples such as his citing of John Harington's work, *Sir John Harington's New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax*, ed. Elizabeth S. Donno p.107:

But I pray you let me go again to merie Martiall: For I should have one more of this, if I have not lost it. *Ad Phoebum*. Oh here I have it.

Korkowski [Kirk], "Blake's Menippean Island", p.205. See also his essay "Tristram Shandy, Digression and the Menippean Tradition."

71 Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Trans. Cohen, p.173ff.

project outlined in *The Jewel* is the nature of the Classical episteme that Foucault writes of in *The Order of Things*:

at the two extremities of the Classical *episteme*, we have a *mathesis* as the science of calculable order and a *genesis* as the analysis of the constitution of orders on the basis of empirical series... Between the *mathesis* and the *genesis* there extends the region of signs — of signs that span the whole domain of empirical representation, but never extend beyond it.<sup>72</sup>

Urquhart's *Ekskybalaaron* has at one extreme the table of origins — his own genealogy — and at the other the complete coincidence of mathesis and taxonomy. This occurs in the mathematical nature of his proposed universal language where the envisioned language represents a “science of calculable order”:

98. Eight and twentiethly, by this language and the letters thereof, we may do such admirable feats in numbers, that no cyfering can reach its compendiousness; for whereas the ordinary way of numbring by thousands of thousands of thousands of thousands doth but confuse the hearer's understanding (to remedy which I have devised even by cyfering it self a far more exact maner of numeration, as in the treatise of arithmetick, which I have ready for the press, is evidently apparent), this language affordeth so concise words for numbering, that the number for setting down, whereof would require in vulgar arithmetick more numbers in a row than there might be grains of sand containable from the center of the earth to the highest heavens, is in it expressed by two letters.

99. Nine and twentiethly, what rational logarithms do by writing, this language doth by heart and by adding of letters shall multiply numbers, which is a most exquisite secret.

100. Thirtiethly, the digits are expressed by vowels and the consonants stand for all the results of the Cephalisme from ten to eighty-one inclusively, whereby many pretty arithmetical tricks are performed.

101. One and thirtiethly, in the denomination of the fixed stars it affordeth the most significant way imaginary; for by the single word alone which represents the star, you shall know the magnitude together with the longitude and latitude, both in degrees and minutes, of the star that is expressed by it.

102. Two and thirtiethly, by one word in this language we shall understand what degree or what minute of the degree of a signe in the zodiake, the sun or moon or any other planet is in.

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72 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.73

103. Three and thirtiethly, as for the yeer of God, the moneth of that yeer, week of the moneth, day of that week, partition of the day, hour of that partition, quarter and half quarter of the hour, a word of one syllable in this language will express it all to the full.<sup>73</sup>

Between this extends his text, the proliferation of signs of which he theorises and of which he makes exorbitant demonstration with his profusion of neologisms. Urquhart becomes a sign himself, identical with his universal language and with the admirable Crichtoun. And he is a sign defined by three notions:

*mathesis, taxinomia* [sic.], *genesis*... a solid grid of kinships that defines the general configuration of knowledge in the Classical age.<sup>74</sup>

Urquhart's transformation of himself into a sign works through a profusion of association and grotesque transformation.

Firstly there is the similarity between the description of Urquhart's project for a universal language as a "most exquisite jewel" and himself. Just as this jewel is something extracted from a dunghill, only having value once it is brought out into the open, so too is Urquhart a 'jewel' who will only have value when he is released from Windsor Castle where he is being held prisoner. As much as *The Jewel* is an encomium for Scotland and also for the Admirable Crichtoun, it is also a work of lavish self praise. Having no other recourse, Urquhart took the only option he could, in a grotesque flight of fancy making a promised universal language identical with himself and only realisable upon his release.

Secondly, there are associational links with the admirable Crichtoun which suggest an identification with Crichtoun on Urquhart's part. The parallels between Urquhart and Crichtoun are strong enough to suggest that Crichtoun was an idealised self-projection. Urquhart writes of Crichtoun that after he had killed the man who had disgracefully killed three champions of the House of Mantua in a duel, his behaviour was that of the exemplary gallant:

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73 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.76 Again I have quoted at length in order to convey the magnitude of the involvement of Urquhart's Jewel in *mathesis*. Surprisingly, Urquhart's faith in the 'concept-number' was not an eccentricity as far as the seventeenth century was concerned. Vivian Salmon writes that "[in Leibniz's Universal language scheme] every concept-number could be expressed by a word of variable form; for example, 81,374 contains 8 x 10,000 1 x 1,000 3 x 100 7 x 10 4, which are represented by the syllables mu bo di le fa, capable of arrangement in any order, so that the number names are self explanatory." Salmon, Vivian. *The Works of Francis Lodwick: A Study of His Writings in the Intellectual Context of the Seventeenth Century*. London: Longman, 1972. p.41

74 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp.73-74

When this sudden rapture was over and all husht into its former tranquility, the noble gallantry and generosity beyond expression of the inimitable Crichtoun did transport them all againe into a new extasie of ravishment, when they saw him like an angel in the shape of a man or as another Mars with the conquered enemie's sword in one hand and the fifteen hundred pistols he had gained in the other, present the sword to the duke as his due and the gold to his high treasurer, to be disponed equally to the three widowes of the three unfortunate gentlemen lately slaine, reserving only to himself the inward satisfaction he conceived for having so opportunely discharged his duty to the House of Mantua.<sup>75</sup>

Urquhart's claims as a duellist are comparable, with the epic number 'three' occurring in Urquhart's account of his own exploits. Urquhart, according to Willcock, wrote:

'My heart,' he says, 'gave me the courage for adventuring in a forrain climate, thrice to enter the lists against men of three severall nations, to vindicate my native country from the calumnies wherewith they had aspersed it; wherein it pleased God so to conduct my fortune, that, after I had disarmed them, they in such sort acknowledged their error, and the obligation they did owe me for sparing their lives, which justly by the law of arms I might have taken, that, in lieu of three enemies that formerly they were, I acquired three constant friends, both to my selfe and my compatriots, whereof by severall gallant testimonies they gave evident prooffe, to the improvement of my country's credit in many occasions.'<sup>76</sup>

In this sense the title of his book is a homophonic celebration of 'the duel', with Urquhart cast as daredevil cavalier. It is also, in another sense, symbolic of Urquhart's quixotic duel with the Scottish Presbyterians he detests so much, his creditors who threaten to deprive him of his estate and, more importantly, a battle of wits with his English captors in order to obtain his release.

The general all-round excellence of the admirable Crichtoun intersects with Urquhart at a number of other points as well. Urquhart's presentation of himself as a literary clown, or at least satirist, seems to coincide with his description of Crichtoun as a superb carnival buffoon, and as such, a satirist:

O, with how great liveliness did he represent the conditions of all manner of men! How naturally did he set before the eyes of the beholders the rogueries of all professions from the overweening monarch to the peevish swaine... He had all the jeers, squibs, flouts, bulls, quips, taunts, whims, jests, clinches, gybes, mokes, jerks, with all the several kinds of equivocations and other sophistical captions, that could properly be

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75 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.106

76 Willcock, *Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromartie*, p.25

adapted to the person by whose representation he intended to inveigle the company into a fit of mirth<sup>77</sup>

Urquhart's own reputation as a wit and buffoon does not rest solely with his translation of Rabelais: it is rumoured that he died in exile in Holland "in a fit of excessive laughter" after hearing of the Restoration of Charles II.<sup>78</sup>

There are also concurrences between Urquhart's linguistic skill and the linguistic skill of Crichtoun. After having established himself in the court of the house of Mantua, Crichtoun travelled to the Colledge of Navarre and in the manner of Pico Della Mirandola, publicly declared by way of notices posted throughout the city that he would

be ready to answer to what should be propounded to him concerning any science, liberal art, discipline or faculty, practical or theoretick, not excluding the theological nor jurisprudential habits, though grounded but upon the testimonies of God and man, and in any of these twelve languages: Hebrew, Syriack, Arabick, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, Italian, English, Dutch, Flemish and Sclavonian, in either verse or prose, at the discretion of the disputant<sup>79</sup>

Naturally, the "eximious" Crichtoun succeeds and is presented with a "diamond ring and a purse full of gold" for his efforts. Willcock writes of Urquhart that "he says of himself that when he travelled through France, Spain, and Italy, he spoke the languages to such perfection that he might easily have passed himself off as a native of any one of these countries."<sup>80</sup> Apart from the similarity of their both being polyglots, Urquhart's expertise as translator of Rabelais and as a linguist who boasts of the invention of a universal language indicate other points of correspondence with Crichtoun. Urquhart also speaks of the rhetorical skill that he could have exhibited throughout his book, but instead saves for an epideictic apology at the end. It is an extensive list, but a short extract will suffice:

I could truly, having before my eyes some known treatises of the author whose muse I honour and the straine of whose pen to imitate is my greatest ambition, have enlarged this discourse with a choicer variety of phrase and made it overflow the field of the reader's understanding with an inundation of greater eloquence; and that one way, tropologically, by

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77 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, pp.113-14

78 Jack and Lyall, Introduction to *The Jewel*, p.10

79 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.107

80 Willcock, *Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty*, p.23

metonymical, ironical, metaphorical and synecdochical instruments of elocution in all their several kinds artificially affected according to the nature of the subject; with emphatical expressions in things of great concernment, with catachrestical in matters of meaner moment, attended on each side respectively with an epiplectick and exegetick modification; with hyperbolical, either epitatically or hypocoristically as the purpose required to be elated or extenuated, they qualifying metaphors and accompanied with apostrophes; and lastly, with allegories of all sorts, whether apologal, affabulatory, parabolary, aenigmatick or paraemial; and on the other part, schematologically adorning the proposed them with the most especial and chief flowers of the garden of rhetorick and omitting no figure either of diction or sentence that might contribute to the ear's enchantment or persuasion of the hearer.

I could have introduced in case of obscurity synonymal, exargastick and palilogetick elucidations; for sweetness of phrase, antimetathetick commutations of epithets...<sup>81</sup>

And so on for another two and a half pages.

This identification of Urquhart with Crichton is a significant aspect of the identification of Urquhart with *The Jewel*, with the sign itself. This largely functions through *The Jewel* operating with the formal conventions of biography. According to Edna Jenkinson, the classical peripatetic biography, of which Suetonius was an exemplar, followed a fixed formula:

the subject's birth, youth and character, achievements and death were narrated, all to an *obligato* [sic.] accompaniment of ethical reflection, and diversified by anecdotes whose purpose was solely to entertain.<sup>82</sup>

M.C. Clarke notes that unlike in England, Suetonius appears on the Scottish grammar-school curriculum from the sixteenth century onward<sup>83</sup> and Urquhart would almost certainly have had access to Suetonius and knowledge of the conventions of the Peripatetic biography. These elements are all present in *The Jewel*, with the birth accounted for by the genetic table, and the youth, character, achievements and death all present associationally in the figure of Urquhart's ideal 'other', the admirable Crichton.

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81 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.204ff.

82 Jenkinson, Edna, "Nepos — an Introduction to Latin Biography" in Dorey, T.A. [ed], *Latin Biography*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, pp.6-7

83 Clarke, M. C. *Classical Education in Britain 1500–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959. p.135

But if *The Jewel* has all the elements of a peripatetic biography, it is also a realisation of the promised universal language. While Salmon and Slaughter find the fantastic diction of *The Jewel* Rabelaisian and satirical, there is a sense in which the profusion of neologisms and portmanteau words represents another jewel, if not supplanting the promised “jewel” of the title. Consider the following passage in which Crichtoun and his beloved consummate their passion for each other shortly before his death:

Thus for a while their eloquence was mute and all they spoke was but with the eye and hand, yet so persuasively, by vertue of the intermutual unlimitedness of their visotactil sensation, that each part and portion of the persons of either was obvious to the sight and touch of the persons of both. The visuriency of either, by ushering the tacturiency of both, made the attraction of both consequent to the inspection of either. Here was it that passion was active and action passive, they both being overcome by other and each the conqueror. To speak of her hirquitalliency at the elevation of the pole of his microcosme or of his luxuriousness to erect a gnomon on her horizontal dial, will perhaps be held by some to be expressions full of obscenity and offensive to the purity of chaste ears; yet seeing she was to be his wife and that she could not be such without consummation of marriage, which signifieth the same thing in effect, it may be thought, as *definitiones logicae verificantur in rebus*, if the exercised act be lawful, that the diction which suppones it can be of no great transgression, unless you would call it a solaecisme or that vice in grammar which imports the copulating of the masculine with the feminine gender.<sup>84</sup>

The image of the gnomon and the sundial recalls the thirty-third proposition of the universal language in which Urquhart claims that in order to ascertain the exact time of day down to the last quarter of an hour, “one syllable in this language will express it all to the full.”<sup>85</sup> Yet her “hirquitalliency” (strongly voiced delight) at “his luxuriousness to erect a gnomon on her horizontal dial” indicates that this language has a materiality which has another purpose than that of the art of memory or of an instant taxonomic mathesis. In a way similar to the accretion of syllables each having meaning in themselves, Urquhart writes of the “visuriency” (desire of seeing) and “tacturiency” (desire of touching), combining the connotations of pruriency with the particular sense in question. By the time Urquhart defends his passage by claiming that there was no obscenity “unless you would call it a solaecisme or that vice in

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84 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, pp.124-25.

85 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.76

grammar which imports the copulating of the masculine with the feminine gender”, it is unclear whether copulation of words is mimetic of the sexual act (and, presumably as generative) or whether the materiality of language, as evidenced elsewhere in the book, is something that is irredeemably material, fetishizable and ultimately sexual as well.

At this point it is useful to return to one of the premises by which he justifies the development of his universal language:

22. Now to return from these [modern languages] to the learned languages, we much acknowledge it to be very strange why, after thousands of yeers continual practice in the polishing of them by men of approved faculties, there is neither in them nor any other tongue hitherto found out, one single word expressive of the vice opposite either to temperance or chastity in the defect, though many rigid monks, even nowadays, be guilty of the one as Diogenes of old was of the other.<sup>86</sup>

In this solecistic sentence the sense revolves around masturbatory images: men of “approved faculties” after “thousands of yeers continual practice in the polishing of language unable to find a word expressive of the vice of “rigid monks”. In fact, a direct connection is then made between the neologism and masturbation:

23. But that which makes this disease the more incurable is, that when an exuberant spirit would to any high researched conceit adapt a peculiar word of his own coyning, he is branded with incivility...<sup>87</sup>

as if the onanistic, perhaps gratuitous pleasure of linguistic coinage is a private pleasure that transgresses the regulation of public language. In short, language as a whole, particularly in the hands of Urquhart, becomes rhytophographical means of escape. To return again to the list, this time Urquhart’s translation of Rabelais, a short list of onomatopoeic descriptions of animal sounds, is amplified by Urquhart into a vast catalogue that exceeds the original threefold. The part in brackets indicates Urquhart’s (and perhaps Motteux’s) interpolations:

Gargantua gave us also the example of a philosopher, who, when he thought most seriously to have withdrawn himself unto a solitary privacy, far away from the rusling clutterments of the tumultuous and confused world, the better to improve his theory, to contrive, comment, and ratiocinate, was, notwithstanding his uttermost endeavours to free himself from all untoward noises, surrounded and environ’d about so with the barking of currs [bawling of mastiffs, bleating of sheep, prating of

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86 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, pp.65-66

87 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.66

parrets, tating of jack-daws, grunting of swine, girning of boars, yelping of foxes, mewing of cats, cheeping of mice, squeaking of weasils, croaking of frogs, crowing of cocks, kekling of hens, calling of partridges, chanting of swans, chattering of jays, peeping of chickens, singing of larks, creaking of geese, chirping of swallows, clucking of moorfowls, cucking of cuckos, bumling of bees, rammage of hawks, chirming of linots, croaking of ravens, screeching of owls, whicking of pigs, gushing of hogs, curring of pigeons, grumbling of cushet-doves, howling of panthers, curkling of quails, chirping of sparrows, crackling of crows, nuzzing of camels, wheening of whelps, buzzing of dromedaries, mumbling of rabbits, cricking of ferrets, humming of wasps, mioling of tygers, bruzzing of bears, sussing of kitnings, clamring of scarfes, whimpring of fullmarts, boing of buffaloes, warbling of nightingales, quavering of meavises, drintling of turkies, coniating of storks, frantling of peacocks, clattering of mag-pyes, murmuring of stock-doves, crouting of cormorants, cigling of locusts, charming of beagles, guarring of puppies, snarling of messens, rantling of rats, guerieting of apes, snuttering of monkees, pioling of pelicanes, quecking of ducks], yelling of wolves, roaring of lions, neighing of horses, crying of elephants, hissing of serpents, and wailing of turtles, that he was much more troubled than if he had been in the middle of the crowd at the fair of Fontenay or Niort.<sup>88</sup>

Snuttering indeed! The original list from Rabelais, fanciful as it may be, is an adaption of a passage from the *Life of Geta* by Ælius Spartianus or *Vita Sancti Hilarionis* by St. Jerome<sup>89</sup> — thus the exotic menagerie has a certain exotic credibility. The list serves to ironically adumbrate the impossibility of sought-after tranquillity: only fleetingly in the Rabelaisian original do we perceive the rhythm of the list itself having a demand on our attention beyond mere signification. But Urquhart's amplification, or dilation upon this theme, has a comic imperative that casts the mimetic (in terms of the onomatopoeic) as something that operates on a level of difference as opposed to imitation. Some of the terms are standard onomatopoeic descriptions, but most, being neologisms, seem more to reflect the individuation of different sounds than sounds imitative of the creature in question. Thus, the theme of mimesis as representation contrariwise to a concept of imitation is again adumbrated by a fundamental formal aspect of the menippea. And yet the magnitude of Urquhart's expansion on this theme reflects an exuberant wit that takes delight in the continual manipulation of a material object, a fetishistic play that suggests the possibility of the condition of language being

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88 Willcock, *Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty*, pp.203-204, citing Rabelais Book iii, Chapter 13

89 Willcock, *Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty*, pp.204-205n.

other than signification and meaning. In fact, he is at pains to stress that “every word in this language signifieth as well backward as forward; and how ever you invert the letters, still shall you fall upon significant words, whereby a wonderful facility is obtained in making of anagrams”<sup>90</sup>

Yet this exuberance and delight in play is not merely infantile: it is a grotesque gesture that demonstrates the possibility of discovery at the extreme. Urquhart obtained his release from the Parliamentarians and eventually made good his exile in Holland, reputedly dying there from a fit of excessive laughter some years later.<sup>91</sup> Unlike Rabelais’s friend Etienne Dolet who “perished at the stake because of his statements, which although less damning had been seriously made [because he] did not use Rabelais’ methods,”<sup>92</sup> Urquhart’s engagement with the menippea constitutes a monumental, self-extolling flight, having nowhere to run except in the manner of Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.”<sup>93</sup>

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90 Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.75

91 Jack and Lyall, Introduction to Urquhart, *The Jewel*, p.10

92 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.269

93 Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964. p.203

# 7

## Grotesque Logic in the Work of Jacques Derrida: Menippean Satire, Deconstruction and the Postmodern

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Derrida explains that the parodic mode used in *Glas* should perhaps be understood in the context of Menippean satire. 'I believe that a text such as *Glas* is neither a philosophical text nor a poetic text, it circulates between these two genres, but in trying to produce another text, which is in another genre; or if one wishes to define those genres at all cost [what would the cost be, if at all] one could refer historically to Menippean satire, to the 'anatomy' (such as *The Anatomy of Melancholy*), to a genre as philosophical parody, in which all genres are convened at once, poetry, philosophy, theatre, etc.' [DOr186 Otobiographie] This allusion to Burton's *Anatomy* helps clarify several puzzling aspects of *Glas*, as well as Derrida's recent evocation of Epicurean atomism...

— JOHN P. LEAVEY, *Glossary*, p. 103

It was an infinite task: that guy carrying the ladder, that typist, that salesgirl, that seven-year-old playing — or *pretending* to play. Didn't totalitarian regimes use children?

— ERNESTO SABATO, *The Angel of Darkness*, pp. 30-31

### 1. The Menippean Renaissance: the Anatomy of Dissimulation

In 1494 the Italian humanist Codro Urceo delivered a lecture in Bologna in which he depicted the human animal as "a ceaseless changeling whose interactions with the phenomenal world are as protean as his manifold roles."<sup>1</sup> This theme of universal dissimulation is expanded upon at length through what has been termed a "menippean lecture".<sup>2</sup> In it, the theme of academic in-fighting and the absurdity of the seemingly endless proliferation of commentary are sent up by one, anatomizing voice. Another voice offers a discerning commentary on the interaction between classical philology as an emerging discipline and a kind of "bourgeois humanism" in which scholars

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1 Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam*, p. 61

2 Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam*, p. 30

compete in a strictly hierarchised, scholarly world for their survival.<sup>3</sup> But the Lucianic trope of the *theatrum mundi*, or world as theatre, is the anatomical cipher to the lecture:

We lecturers are also *fabulae*. For when every single year we are about to comment on something new we put out public invitations, we fasten handwritten papers in the halls of the universities and the churches, and on the pillars in the piazzas; we summon rectors of the schools, dialecticians, philosophers, doctors, lawyers, poets, grammarians, senators, courtiers, and even lower-class literati (*plebeios quoque litteratos*). The chair is embellished, the seat hung with tapestries, and at last, having donned the robes, we begin to speak to those gathered about. This professor praises Homer, that one Vergil; this one Demosthenes, that one Cicero; this one Lucan, that one Statius. And in the end, when the peroration has been finished, what have we at last? *Fabulae*. And you listeners are also *fabulae*.<sup>4</sup>

The passage reproduced above suggests that the *fabulae*, or dissimulated roles, are not just a universal feature of the world but seem also to be a consequence of the menippean anatomization he undertakes. By menippean anatomization is meant the kind of farrago that undertakes a comprehensive inclusion of the world within its exuberant agenda of detailed description or listing. In Urceo's case there is a prolific list of classes of people which brings all the strata of intellectual (secular and non-secular) society together under the one gaze. This is possible only because of his presupposed condition of widespread dissimulation that gives such anatomization licence. The fact that the *plebeios quoque litteratos* and the cream of intellectual society can come together suggests a carnivalization of sorts, a heterogeneous and subversive mingling only explicable by the presupposition of *fabulae*. Beneath this logic of the *theatrum mundi* lies a further suggestion — that the appearance of sanity in the world is not as one might expect, a result of the renunciation of *fabulae* but rather a further dissimulation of such *fabulae*, a play at seriousness if you like. This dissimulation of dissimulation, which I will later argue is the most adequate way of thinking the serio-comic, was also one of the most powerful ways of conceptualizing the problems historically unique to the Renaissance scholar, a way which allowed the simultaneity

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3 Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam*, pp.60-66. Blanchard's somewhat anachronistic term "bourgeois humanism" explains the exploitation of a public, individual 'self' as a performed role used to compete against other scholarly voices.

4 Cited in Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam*, p. 65

of an anti-institutional, demotic critique and an institutionalized, hierarchical discourse.

The menippean satire in the Renaissance, in the hands of humanists such as Urceo and his Florentine correspondent Poliziano and others such as Valla, Alberti, Pontano, Calcagnini and later Erasmus and More, Cornelius Agrippa, Pico della Mirandola, Giordano Bruno, Kepler, Cyrano de Bergerac and Francis Godwin, was the vehicle for a far-reaching and self-reflexive study of the role of the scholar in society and of the dissimulation that is potentially involved in the adoption of such roles.<sup>5</sup> As a tireless “iconoclast and archaeologist”, the grotesque strategies of the menippean satirist, particularly in the Renaissance, provided a liberating way in which some specific challenges of the time could be met: the “flood of print that had emerged from the first century of printing”<sup>6</sup>, and the concomitant jockeying for positions within a scholarly hierarchy that involved the presentation of a professional ‘self’ in an intellectual market place.

This very cursory survey of menippean satire in the Renaissance and its adoption by certain humanists as a key tool for uncovering, anatomizing and recombining categories of thought, raises the question of not just the implication of menippean satire in philosophy, but of the historical and ideological importance of such a strategic series of grotesque outbursts. In order to examine this question further, I wish to look simultaneously forwards and backwards from this point at the beginning of the modern age before turning to the work of Jacques Derrida and some of his contemporaries.

## 2. Nietzsche and Plato: The Consolation of Follosophy

In the first of his courses on Nietzsche, Heidegger writes that Nietzsche’s “procedure, his manner of thinking in the execution of the new valuation [of nihilism] is perpetual reversal.”<sup>7</sup> More specifically, this reversal is often a carnivalesque inversion of Platonism, one that is predicated upon Nietzsche’s own menippean strategy and his awareness of what he perceived to be Plato’s own menippean pedigree. The case for

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5 A more complete list of didascalical menippean satire and menippean satire which serves as a vehicle for the promulgation of new scientific thought can be found in Kirk, *Menippean Satire*, pp. 21-143.

6 Blanchard, *Scholar's Bedlam*, p. 76

7 Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche. Vol.1: The Will to Power as Art*. Trans. David Farrell Krell. [4 Vols.]. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. p. 200

the menippean elements of Plato has been well, if not conclusively argued. Blanchard has noted that “Plato himself — or perhaps Socrates — had some Menippean blood in his veins, despite the transcendental and comprehensive nature of Plato’s full-blown philosophical system.”<sup>8</sup> Relihan notes that “had Plato written like Aristotle, Menippean satire may never have gotten off the ground.”<sup>9</sup> Relihan’s assertion is all the more convincing in the general context of his thesis that menippean satire and romance have similar origins, a point he explores in an extended analysis of the Myth of Er in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*.<sup>10</sup> There is also the rather more well-known discussion of the carnivalesque nature of the Socratic dialogue in Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, where the crowning/decrowning of meaning and the carnivalistic familiarization of relations among the participants in the dialogue suggest a familiarizing of attitudes towards the object of thought itself, also a typical feature of the menippea.<sup>11</sup>

Several of the Platonic Socratic dialogues could be considered as menippean satires: the *Sophist*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are the most salient examples. The attention the *Phaedrus* receives in *Dissemination* focusses on the *pharmakon* of writing as “that dangerous supplement,”<sup>12</sup> a familiar enough feature of the menippea. Derrida considers at length the various themes of text as textile, or fabric, and of the myth of writing as embodied in the myth of Theuth, while mentioning but not dwelling on the “wandering scroll” of the character Phaedrus and the ‘locus amoenus’ of the shady brook-side copse where Socrates and Phaedrus have their leisurely dialogue. In fact the erotic potential of this work, as with the *Symposium*, begs the kind of attention that Plato deserves: not just as the source of a systematic philosophical discursivity, but also as a menippean philosopher who paradoxically includes within his oeuvre ribaldry and excess as well as the kind of solemn meditative, even “logocentric” tradition that Derrida has exhaustively discussed. The dialogic relation of the menippean to the traditional Platonic line is such that it exposes the menippean character of the works of Plato himself.

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8 Blanchard, *Scholar’s Bedlam*, p. 67

9 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 180

10 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, pp. 33-34; pp. 180-82

11 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*, pp. 132-33

12 Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 110

The last source of discussion of Plato as menippean satirist is, appropriately, from Nietzsche. He writes:

In respect to Plato I am a thorough sceptic and have always been unable to join in the admiration of Plato the *artist* which is traditional among scholars. After all, I have here the most refined judges of taste of antiquity themselves on my side. It seems to me that Plato mixes together all forms of style; he is therewith in the matter of style a *first decadent*: he has on his conscience something similar to the Cynics who devised the *Satura Menippea*.<sup>13</sup>

Given Nietzsche's strategy of reversal, this apparent damning of Plato for his menippean decadence should not necessarily be read as a disclaimer of Nietzsche's own menippean strategy. Elsewhere, Nietzsche has written of the superior human being, or philosopher:

if he is lucky, however, as a favourite child of knowledge ought to be, he will encounter means of facilitating and cutting short his task — I mean so-called cynics, that is to say people who recognize the animal, the commonness, the 'rule' in themselves and yet still possess a degree of spirituality and appetite which constrains them to speak of themselves and their kind *before witnesses* — sometimes they even wallow in books as in their own dung. Cynicism is the only form in which common souls come close to honesty, and the higher man must prick up his ears at every cynicism, whether coarse or refined, and congratulate himself whenever a buffoon without shame or a scientific satyr speaks out in his presence.<sup>14</sup>  
[underlining mine]

While it need not be explained that the cynicism to which Nietzsche refers is the Cynic philosophy of which Menippus was both a mocker and an adherent, the cynic *form* to which he refers is the menippea, which is the form of most of Nietzsche's writings: hence the heterogeneity of his writing which is a medley of aphorisms, maxims, bombast and poetry, a grotesque form which maintains the chronotope of the ceaselessly *present* that is characteristic of the menippea.<sup>15</sup> It is no mere whimsy then (or maybe it is), that leads Nietzsche to proclaim, in relation to Wagner's *Parsifal*, that

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13 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols AND The Antichrist*, p. 116

14 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pp. 39-40

15 See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 118-19 for the discussion of the currency of the topicality of the menippea and the essay "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* pp. 84-259, particularly the discussion of the Rabelaisian Chronotope, pp. 224-242

“in ages like this, art has a right to *pure folly* as a kind of holiday for the spirit, the wits and the heart. Wagner understood that. *Pure folly* is a restorative...”<sup>16</sup>

This “pure folly” is not unrelated to the figure of the man of *ressentiment* that appears in *The Genealogy of Morals*. They are connected by way of the subterranean nature of *ressentiment*: when discussing the motivation of those “English psychologists” who are concerned with the history of the origin of morality, Nietzsche asks whether or not it is

a petty subterranean hostility and rancor toward Christianity (and Plato) that has perhaps not even crossed the threshold of consciousness? Or even a lascivious taste for the grotesque, the painfully paradoxical, the questionable and absurd in existence?<sup>17</sup>

Nietzsche’s understanding of the grotesque ranges across its subterranean as well as festive elements, something that belongs in the cave as much as it is an instance of “pure folly”. Earlier in the same work he writes of cheerfulness “or in my own language *gay science*” as “the reward of a long, brave, industrious, and subterranean seriousness.”<sup>18</sup> In fact the man of *ressentiment*, or the abject hero, as Bernstein has it, represents one aspect of the negative potential of the menippea:

Fundamentally one can cope with everything else, born as one is to a subterranean struggle; one emerges again and again into the light, one experiences again and again one’s golden hour of victory — and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new, even harder, remoter things, like a bow that distress only serves to draw tighter.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than have light and the subterranean, seriousness and folly, reason and the grotesque form a series of binary oppositions in order to simplify his argument, Nietzsche continually stresses the interdependency of each. The inference to be drawn is that knowledge, as the condition of emergence into the light, is only made possible through engagement with the subterranean, or grotesque. The grotesque as a mode of discovery is a recurring feature of Nietzsche’s work, the *gay science* which sings and sizzles.

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16 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols AND The Antichrist*, p. 90

17 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On The Genealogy of Morals AND Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1989. p. 24

18 Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 21

19 Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 44

For Derrida, Nietzsche is “the philosopher who speaks in the first person while all the time multiplying proper names, masks and signatures,”<sup>20</sup> a grotesque strategy not unrelated to Derrida’s own textual practices. Derrida’s engagement with Nietzsche serves as a kind of stylistic adequation of the grotesque logic of Nietzsche’s oeuvre and is also an index of Nietzsche’s gargantuan significance in contemporary thought. Both thinkers are remarkable for the extraordinarily generative function they serve for those that come after them, a fact which alone might be indicative of the significance of the menippea as a mode of discovery.

The genealogical context of menippean philosophy provides a useful grounding for any discussion of Nietzsche or Derrida. Just as Nietzsche refers back to Plato and is obsessed, in his own way, with a particular reversal of western thought, such a mode of thinking is only possible by participation in the very same menippean tradition with which Plato also had strong affiliations. If it is fair to say that Menippus was the object of “emulation in literary circles and the object of scorn in philosophical circles... [both] equally plausible reactions to the same thing, a self-parodic mocker of philosophy and of Cynic preaching”<sup>21</sup>, then the examples of Plato and Nietzsche and their inter-relatedness expose the implication of philosophy in menippean satire (and vice versa).

This represents a particular genealogy of the menippea that can be traced, albeit sketchily, from Menippus and Plato through Varro, Julian the Apostate, Athenaeus, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Fulgentius, Boethius, Vergilius, Saxo Grammaticus, Bernardus Sylvestrus, the Italian humanists listed earlier, Erasmus, More, Bruno, Godwin, Burton, Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Barthes, Baudrillard and Derrida. In this particular genealogy, the menippean interpenetrates with the scholarly or the philosophical discourse in a particularly concentrated way that often leaves the fantastic, or coarsely bodily to one side, substituting for it wildly digressive, often paradoxical and intricate arguments and scholarly sophistications that could be characterised as a *grotesque logic*. For many scholars, this particular genealogy of menippean satire is menippean satire *per se*. Frye’s insistence on the *philosophus gloriosus* as one of the chief hallmarks of the genre finds its easiest identification in the figure of the comically inflated scholar or philosopher, as is often found in Peacock, or in the systematic

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20 Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 35

21 Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, p. 39

satirisation of systems of thought that is evident in the work of Swift. As a means of characterising the menippea in a philosophical or scholarly genealogy, the idea of a grotesque logic is a useful means of understanding the particularity of the significance of grotesque writings such as those of Derrida and, by way of association, those of what is termed postmodern as well.

### 3. The Postmodern menippea: paradoxology and post-carnivalism

The postmodern condition is characterised by Lyotard as an “incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>22</sup> In fact the importance of narrative for knowledge is given a great deal of emphasis by Lyotard: “Lamenting the ‘loss of meaning’ in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative.”<sup>23</sup> Given the “crisis of legitimation” which is said to characterise postmodernism, the importance of language games, for Lyotard, lies in the possibility of manipulating, subverting or distorting the rules of those games in order to achieve the genuinely new:

it is important to increase displacement in the [language] games, and even to disorient it, in such a way as to make an unexpected ‘move’ (a new statement).<sup>24</sup>

Lyotard’s position reflects a deep scepticism of the ‘enlightenment project’, positing the postmodern as a definitive rupture with the past. Such a position is implicitly critical of a philosopher such as Habermas, who retains an interest in the possibility of historical continuity. For Habermas, the postmodern is the “unfinished project of modernity”, with skeptics of the possibility of legitimation dubbed “neoconservatives” for their refusal to embrace the possibility of furtherance of the enlightenment project. According to Lyotard, Habermas’ research is sustained by a belief that “regularization of the ‘moves’ permitted in all language games” is one of the means by which humanity as a collective seeks emancipation.<sup>25</sup> For Lyotard, the possibility of rupture is necessary for the discovery of the new, whereas for Habermas the discovery of the new is implicit in the possibility of history. But advances of avant-garde theoretism

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22 Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Fredric Jameson. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992. p. xxiv

23 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 26

24 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 16

25 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 66

are constrained by their own historicity: "Whoever defeats the theoretical avant-garde of today and overcomes the existing hierarchy of knowledge will be the theoretical avant-garde of tomorrow and will erect a new hierarchy of knowledge."<sup>26</sup> In order to escape this redundancy, Habermas argues that critical theory must try "to formulate an idea of progress that is subtle and resilient enough not to let itself be blinded by the mere appearance [*Schein*] of emancipation. One thing, of course, it must oppose: the thesis that emancipation itself mystifies."<sup>27</sup>

Adherence to either view has profound consequences for the positioning and meaning of art and theory in the postmodern age. For Lyotard, "the essay (Montaigne) is postmodern, while the fragment (*The Athaeneum*) is modern."<sup>28</sup> That is, the postmodern text is not a manifestation of pre-existent categories and rules but an essaying forth in search of those rules and categories, and in search of new presentations in order to represent the unrepresentable. In distinction, the modern text is characterised by a nostalgic "aesthetic of the sublime."<sup>29</sup> For Habermas, the arts serve to "explore a living historical situation."<sup>30</sup> According to Rorty

Those who want sublimity are aiming at a postmodernist form of intellectual life. Those who want beautiful social harmonies want a postmodernist form of social life, in which society as a whole asserts itself without bothering to ground itself.<sup>31</sup>

The sublime in this context is the Kantian sublime, and specifically with regard to Lyotard, it is "the limit-point of knowledge and representation... a topos whose significance extends far beyond the realm of aesthetic judgement."<sup>32</sup> Yet this is one among many sublimes. From the point of view of the menippea and the comic mode generally, the grotesque sublime is a topos of transformation and articulation. In fact the menippea occupies a uniquely ambivalent position with regard to the terms of the

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26 Habermas, Jürgen. "The Genealogical Writing of History: On Some Aporias in Foucault's Theory of Power". *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 1986 10:1 1–9. p. 5

27 Habermas, Jürgen, cited in White, Stephen K., *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 4

28 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 81

29 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 81

30 Cited by Rorty, Richard, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" in Bernstein, Richard J. [ed], *Habermas and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 1985, p. 174

31 Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" in Bernstein, *Habermas and Modernity*, p. 175

32 Norris, Christopher. *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992. p. 49

debate between Lyotard and Habermas. It is the mode of much of what is deemed postmodern theory and literature and yet it is also a vital conduit of modernity and, in particular, of modernism: Joyce, Beckett, Eliot, Pound, Flann O'Brien, Kafka and Proust.<sup>33</sup> As a form which straddles both positions on postmodernism, consideration of menippean satire in this context affords valuable insights into what is generally termed the postmodern.

The postmodern novel, as defined by Ihab Hassan, accords with much that characterises the menippea:

1. It avoids symbolism; its reality is phenomenological and on the surface.
2. It promotes indeterminacy; its language slips and slides and resists interpretation. The breakdown of syntax is designed to defer and postpone any absolute translation of the work — it is an open, dialogic, and polyphonic field of possibilities.
3. It seeks fragmentation. It is against holism and reconciliation, and is concerned with irony rather than catharsis.
4. It is self-reflexive, i.e. it is conscious of itself and opposed to realist verisimilitude.
5. It is pluralist. It is a hybrid genre, an unmargined discourse, which privileges intertextuality.
6. It uses topographic variations, i.e. it fragments itself visually and physically.
7. It celebrates parody, play and pastiche. It is anti-Promethean and resists any notion of textuality that promotes possession or genius.
8. It questions the unifying voice and is anti-authorship.<sup>34</sup>

Hybridity, irony, intertextuality, fragmentation, formal variation, parody and self-reflexivity are all prominent features of the menippea. Writing of alphabetization, the piecemeal projection of a partial fictional world through ordering via the alphabet, Brian McHale writes, “this is especially characteristic of Menippean satire, hybrid fictional-nonfictional, discursive-narrative texts which are often made up of

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33 The inclusion of Proust and Kafka in this list of modern menippeans is problematic, although not without precedent: Kristeva writes of the “carnavalesque structure” that is incorporated within the polyphonic, modern novel which, in the case of Proust and Kafka, becomes “interior to language”. *Desire in Language*, p. 71

34 Cited in Hopper, *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*, pp. 15-16

discontinuous, heterogeneous fragments.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, McHale has gone on to state that “Postmodernist fiction is the heir of Menippean satire and its most recent historical avatar.”<sup>36</sup>

But Hassan, like McHale, if he is conscious of the tradition of menippean satire, is concerned with it only to the extent that it is a variation in the genealogy of the development of the novel. There is no question that the twentieth century has seen a dramatic resurgence of the menippea in modernist and postmodernist texts: so much so that some critics have taken the extraordinary step of declaring menippean satire to be the representative genre for the entire postwar period.<sup>37</sup> Such claims derive more from the relatively recent upsurge of critical interest in the menippea than in any quantum leap in writing practices. Yet the relative abundance of menippean satire in the contemporary novel has obscured its dramatic reappearance in theoretical and philosophical texts. As with that other high point of menippean theory, the Renaissance, the latter half of the twentieth century has provided the general context of rapid change accompanied by a general “distrust of metanarratives”. Hence the disjunctive nature of the menippea can be seen as a reflection and an exacerbation of this set of conditions.

However, the revolutionary potential of the menippea, as might be evidenced in the work of Rushdie or Derrida, Barth or Barthes, Ballard or Baudrillard, can also be a conservative potential, as is clear in Eliot’s menippean satire, *The Waste Land*. Derrida points to this when he says that “the freedom to say everything is a very powerful political weapon, but one which might immediately let itself be neutralized as fiction. This revolutionary power can become very conservative.”<sup>38</sup> In other words the enthymemic irony that is implicit in the menippea gives it the potential to disrupt, invert, puncture and subvert as much as it entrenches, underscores, reinforces and redefines. In this sense, menippean satire inhabits the middle ground between the opposed positions of Lyotard and Habermas. It is playfully disruptive, yet for all of the irresponsibility (or just plain silliness, according to Norris<sup>39</sup>) of its textual

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35 McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1993. p. 157

36 McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, pp. 172-73

37 Kharpertian, *A Hand to Turn the Time*, p. 56 citing Elliot Braha, “Menippean Form in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and in Other Contemporary American Texts” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979.

38 Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 38

39 Norris, *Uncritical Theory*, p. 11

freeplay, it is capable of generating new discourses and insights, of signalling the potential, perhaps, of the Habermasian “ideal speech situation.” In a broadly humanist sense, the continuity of a tradition of discontinuity represents a festive negativity that perversely functions as a mode of discovery. Although Habermas dubs the postmodern avatars of this tradition “neoconservatives”, there is a very real sense in which the innovative tendencies of the philosophical menippea invest the “ongoing project of modernity” with a rich resource.

George Steiner recognises this when he writes that

high Comedy can be among the most searching and challenging of forms. At their finest (in certain texts by Barthes, for instance), the new semiotics are a ‘send-up’ — Hegel’s *Aufhebung* literalized — not only of their purported object, but of themselves. The deconstructive saturnalia, the carnival of dislocations, the masques of non-meaning need to be taken most seriously where they can be seen as a variant on merriment.<sup>40</sup>

The current “deconstructive saturnalia” of menippean theory is manifested in a variety of forms, be it in the guise of learned wit, as with much of the later Barthes or with the Agamben of *Idea of Prose*, or the fantastic fictive theorisations of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus*, or the provocatively paradoxical style of Baudrillard or the textual innovations of Derrida’s *Glas*, *Cinders* or *The Post Card*.

Roland Barthes in particular is a good example of a postmodern thinker who utilises the menippea. In *S/Z* (1970), the work which is generally acknowledged as Barthes’ break with ‘high structuralism’, semiotic analysis is performed to an extent that exposes the limitations of structuralism conceived as a ‘scientific’ system. For Eagleton, *S/Z* makes clear the point that a text is “irreducibly plural, an endless play of signifiers which can never be finally nailed down to a single centre, essence or meaning.”<sup>41</sup> Much of the impact of *S/Z* is visual: the page is fragmented by the different lexias (561 in all) into which Barthes has separated Balzac’s story “Sarrasine”, fragmenting any claim to unity of meaning. It is also an apparently arbitrary anatomization of Balzac’s story, with some lexias mere words while others are entire paragraphs. The overall effect of the book is transformative, turning a short story from a so-called master of realism into a self-defeating, self-deconstructing text of immense complexity.

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40 Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there Anything in What We Say?*, p. 115

41 Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 138

In fact, much of the later Barthes can be considered to be menippean satire. In what is perhaps his most famous essay, “The Death of the Author”, the deliberate indulgence in paradox recalls the tradition of the paradoxical encomium as exemplified by Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*.<sup>42</sup> In *The Pleasure of the Text*, the eroticisation of reading, in particular the *jouissance* of reading, is held up against purely ideological analysis:

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas — for my body does not have the same ideas I do.<sup>43</sup>

The menippean form of the work adumbrates this point: the arbitrary ordering of the text through alphabetization, a common theme of the postmodern menippea in texts such as Derrida’s *Limited Inc* or Barth’s *Letters* emphasises the role of chance in the creation of meaning. In *Camera Lucida*, the second half of the book is a palinode of the position elaborated in the first half with the title itself signalling a paradoxical, playful intent.

Perhaps the most deceptive of Barthes’ menippea is his *Empire of Signs*. He takes care to point out at the beginning of the book that the Japan of his text is the result of having isolated certain features somewhere in the world and deliberately forming a system in order to discover “the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems.”<sup>44</sup> Of course, this has not prevented the Library of Congress from cataloguing the book as being concerned with ‘Japan — Civilization,’ nor has it discouraged critics from reading the book as a virtual window on Japan and its culture. If there is a focus to the work, it is on the aporia that exists between western semiotic systems and Japanese semiosis and, ultimately, on the aporia that lies at the heart of any semiotic system.

*Empire of Signs* is structured around two innocuously familiar notions: symmetry and rhyppography. The correspondence of oppositions and the pairing of similar images, such as the photographs of the actor Kazuo Funaki that frame the text, reveal differences that are transformative in the manner that Barthes calls “a repetition without origin, an event without cause, a memory without person, a language without

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42 Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. and ed Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977. pp. 142-54

43 Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986. p. 17

44 Barthes, Roland. *Empire of Signs*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995. pp. 3-4

moorings.”<sup>45</sup> A good example of this is the pair of photographs that appear in his chapter “The Written Face.” In the top right hand corner of the page is a photograph of Barthes which appeared in the *Kobe Shinbun*, of which Barthes remarks that he “finds himself ‘Japanned,’ eyes elongated, pupils blackened by Nipponese typography.”<sup>46</sup> Barthes thus finds himself doubly transformed, his eyes ‘japanned’ with black, glossy varnish but also japanified in the sense that he comes to resemble more than slightly Teturo Tanba, the actor whose photograph complements Barthes’ in the lower left-hand corner of the page. In distinction to Barthes’ ‘Japannedness’, Tanba, “‘citing’ Anthony Perkins, has lost his Asiatic eyes. What then is our face,” asks Barthes, “if not a ‘citation’?”<sup>47</sup> The positioning of each head on the page slightly inclines each toward the other, as if their respective transformations would lead to a kind of convergence. This visual metaphor is an example of grotesque transformation which exposes the void, or silence of signification. The white page separating the two photographs is like an infinitude that inhabits the space between two reflecting mirrors: a surdic space, a loquacious silence.

The principle of symmetry, such as the photograph of the Shikidai gallery at Nijo Castle (“Turn the image upside down” suggests Barthes: “nothing more, nothing else, nothing”<sup>48</sup>) underlies the refrain “the nullity of meaning.” The abolition of the sign and the absence of anything to grasp do not characterise the empire of Japanese signs so much as they divulge the aporia that is exposed by the supervention of one semiotic system upon another. In a sense Barthes is trying to discover, in its extremity, characteristics of a semiotics toward which the Western tradition is prejudiced in attributing to it the function of “*expressing* a content, an inwardness, a nature.”<sup>49</sup> It is precisely the menippean form which allows this extremity, the discourse “which can only contest meaning only by rendering its discourse incomprehensible.”<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, rhytopgraphy rediscovers the everyday world in its mundaneity, finding significance in that which is of little or no significance with the result that another inflection is added to the refrain of “the nullity of meaning.” Barthes’ text, like his

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45 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 79

46 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 90

47 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 90

48 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 50

49 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 103

50 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 81

*Mythologies*, is populated with things that dare to be dismissed as meaningless: pachinko, chopsticks, the eyelid, packaging, food, a scrap of paper with the details of a meeting scrawled on it. Barthes' epideictic analyses promise a comprehensive survey of a culture, but eventually collapse into what they are: a display of learned wit satirising itself, semiotics and the role of the scholar. In the end, Barthes' learned wit is commensurate with the objects of its rhytopography, exposing the nullity of meaning and transforming it into a brilliantly loquacious silence.

Considered from this point of view both *Mythologies* and *Empire of Signs* belong to the menippean tradition of the paradoxical encomium, particularly in its manifestation in the Renaissance where "in the form of an encomium of 'things without honour' and in the defence of opinions contrary to the common one, a minor rhetorical genre became a major seriocomic one."<sup>51</sup> *Mythologies* and *Empire of Signs* are direct descendants of the paradoxical encomium that includes Harington's *The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, much of Rabelais, *Utopia* (which contains in its second part Hythlodæus' praise of Nowhereland), Cornelius Agrippa's *De Vanitate*, Synesius of Cyrenes's *Praise of Baldness*. In particular they share an affiliation with the genealogy of the philosophical menippea. Henry Knight Miller notes the authors of many renaissance paradoxical encomia such as

Daniel Heinsius on the louse (*Laus pediculi*), Philipp Melanchthon on the ant (*Laus formicae*), Bilibaldi Pirckheimer on the gout (*Laus or Apologia podagrae*), Caelio Calcagnino on the flea (*Pulicis encomium*), M. Antonius Majoragio on mud (*Luti encomium*), Joannes Passerati on the ass (*Encomium asini*), Janus Dousa on shade (*In laudem umbrae*), Justus Lipsius on the elephant (*Laus elephantis*), Franciscus Scribanus on the fly (*Muscae ex continua comparatione cum principe encomium*), and Erycius Puteanus on the egg (*Ovi encomium*). All these authors — German, Dutch, Italian, French — were, it will be observed, humanists and scholars of some importance.<sup>52</sup>

The trivial nature of many paradoxical encomia should not detract from the fact that it was (and given the evidence of many postmodern theoretical texts, still is) a major, popular genre intended for the learned elite.

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51 Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", pp. 125-26.

52 Miller, "The Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to Its Vogue in England, 1600-1800", p. 152

As such, the paradox is an important feature of many menippea. The unveiling or presentation of a paradox suggests that the single, monological *doxon*, or *doxa* as its elaboration, is never entirely adequate as a means of explaining the world. In fact, the paradox, while being a form of grotesque logic, represents a puncturing of the notion that there can ever be a single, adequate system of thought, argument, or opinion to describe or account for the world.

One similarity between the twentieth century and the Renaissance is the prevalence of the paradox as a means of seriously entertaining discovery and furthering understanding of the world. Gödel's theorem, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and the paradox of Schrodinger's cat have all achieved a certain notoriety for their apparent difficulty and their undoubted significance. The paradox has also reemerged in connection with the humanities, notably in literary theory and philosophy. Its perennial popularity no doubt has to do with its verve, as Holland notes: "It is precisely the difficulty of drawing the line between jest and seriousness that gives the paradox its intellectual vitality."<sup>53</sup> The undecidability of the ludic character of the paradox is its defining feature and accounts for its striking power more than its difficulty or ability to confuse. Holland writes that

The germ of ambivalence is present in the very situation of paradox, whether it is nurtured by fictional devices or not... It challenges the accepted truths by raising the possibility of another way of looking at them. Its proper force is not that of affirmation or negation but of experiment, of the testing of received ideas.<sup>54</sup>

More often than not, this "testing of received ideas" is underpinned by a serious intent. To cite Holland again, "Paradox, with its ironic inconclusiveness and sport with opposites was a form that could accommodate relativity and scepticism. Behind the free play of literary recreation, however, there usually lies a firm belief in a transcendent value."<sup>55</sup>

The difference between the postmodern and Renaissance paradox revolves precisely around this point. Paradox without transcendence proves the most difficult obstacle of all to most conventional readers of Derrida, Baudrillard and Barthes. Rather than a

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53 Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", p. 129

54 Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", p. 130.

55 Holland, "Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Menippean Satire, Humanist and English", p. 133.

single transcendence underlying their work, their style is characterised by a grotesque sublime accreted around a transformative paradoxology. This sublime is one aspect of a satiric *catascopia* that is characteristic of the uppermost level of the tripartite division of the menippean world.

In this sense, postmodernism can be said to be not so much carnivalesque as *after* carnival: that is, the post-carnival condition is not characterised by the rupture of carnival as much as it is by a state of continual, suffuse play with no particular centre of gravity to explain away the explosive moment of puncture. Post-carnivalism is that state of continual ludism in which the primary features of carnival have become so diffuse and omnipresent that that moment of festive inversion in a world already perpetually inverted is no longer possible.

Like Derrida, Barthes privileges certain “modernist” texts which are more adequate to the particular ideas and forms in which he engages. In *Empire of Signs*, while discussing *Bunraku*, or puppet theatre, Barthes writes

As in the modern text, the interweaving of codes, references, discrete assertions, anthological gestures multiplies the written line, not by virtue of some metaphysical appeal, but by the interaction of a *combinatoire* which opens out into the entire space of the theater: what is begun by one is continued by the next, without interval.<sup>56</sup>

This is typical of much of what passes as postmodern and, to a lesser extent, deconstruction: a recurrent privileging of certain modernist texts such as Joyce’s *Ulysses* or the works of Beckett, Kafka and Proust, among others. Derrida is quite explicit on this point:

Let’s make this clear. What we call literature (not belles-lettres or poetry) implies that license is given to the writer to say everything he wants to or everything he can, while remaining shielded, safe from all censorship, be it religious or political.<sup>57</sup>

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida has also written

only a certain practice of theoretical fiction can work (against) the frame, (make or let it) play (it) (against) itself.<sup>58</sup>

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56 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, p. 55

57 Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 37

58 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 81

While 'literature' has a fairly specific ambit for postmodernism and deconstruction, the "theoretical fiction" of which Derrida writes is even more delimited: as menippean satire it is that "special kind of art that defends its own creative detachment" and constitutes "art's first line of defence against all such invasions [of censorship, expurgation and hierarchisation in the arts]."<sup>59</sup> John P. Leavey has noted in the case of Derrida that "the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire are the two generic roots for the carnivalization of literature, a tradition that Derrida has now extended into philosophy in the modern era. Whatever modest sacrifices of "originality" result from placing Derrida in his acknowledged context, they are more than compensated for by the opportunities he creates for a new academic writing by his renewal of this relatively neglected genre."<sup>60</sup>

For Barthes and Derrida, the text, or literature, is a highly specific entity, one that is grounded in a particular ludic generic context. The bias in postmodernity toward textual play is one feature of the resurgent fascination with the menippea. In fact, the postmodern text is inscribed in such a way as to resist definitive or authoritative meaning with a reflexivity that is typical of the menippea, so much so that for Barthes the text is (or should be) that most menippean of people, "that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*."<sup>61</sup>

The most explicit identification of menippean satire as a vehicle for contemporary theoretical writing, however, comes from Derrida. At a recent conference I had asked of Derrida, via a satellite link-up, a question regarding the importance of menippean satire for his writing:

Q: Professor Derrida, you once described a generic affiliation your work *Glas* has with menippean satire, citing Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Derrida: (*cupping ear*) What? ... Who? ... What? ... Who?

Q: You also refer to other well known menippean satires in "Ulysses Gramophone" and elsewhere. To what extent would you say that menippean satire informs much of your work?

Derrida: Alan, there is a word I didn't hear... what is the word before satire? Money pun?

Q: To what extent would you say that menippean satire informs much of your work?

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59 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 231

60 Leavey, John P. *Glassary*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. p. 107c

61 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 53

Derrida: Ah!... menippean satire, hmm? For me it's at the same time a great historical model with resources we have not exhausted yet, but at the same time it's a circumscribed figure of the past. So I play in the mode of menippean satire but I play with it too. That is, I situate it as a historical and past possibility. So on the one hand I think this possibility is not exhausted yet so I draw from it as much as I can but at the same time I try to analyse it and to situate it as a given and past possibility. So I play with it, I quote it, in a certain way, I use it, I draw from it and I quote it, sometimes very seriously, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly (*bursts out laughing*). The most menippean satirical texts of mine are not the ones which are identifiable as such. Sometimes they are... they belong to this tradition in the most serious and academic texts I have written.<sup>62</sup>

Such a direct statement confirms the implications of motifs scattered throughout his work: in *The Post Card* Derrida says "I have necessarily written upside down — and in order to surrender to Necessity,"<sup>63</sup> positing a carnivalesque writing practice; of himself, in typically menippean, self-deflating fashion he confesses a mock fear, that he may be "already speaking all alone and playing like a smart monkey on a typewriter."<sup>64</sup>

Derrida distinguishes between writing in a playful mode and playing with a playful mode, although the two may ultimately be inseparable. What would seem to distinguish Derrida from many of his contemporaries is his awareness of the supplementarity of the menippean mode of deconstruction. What is even more significant is his statement that works other than *Glas*, *The Post Card* or *Cinders* are also menippean satires. The depth of Derrida's understanding of the menippea signals an important and as yet relatively unexplored aspect of Derrida's work, as well as investing the menippea with an importance beyond its current status as novelistic precursor or the mode of the postmodern novel.

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62 Derrida, Jacques. Keynote Address to "One Hundred Years of Cruelty — Artaud Conference". Sydney: Artspace, 1996, videocassette. This paper and interview are part of a projected publication of the conference for 1997. The 'Alan' of the transcript is Dr. Alan Cholodenko, who asked the question on my behalf.

63 Derrida, Jacques. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987. p. 194

64 Derrida, *The Post Card*, p. 128

#### 4. Derrida and Nietzsche — the Menippean Éperon.

In his book on Nietzsche's styles, Derrida asks the question of the cryptic Nietzschean fragment 'I have forgotten my umbrella': "what if Nietzsche was only pretending to say something?"<sup>65</sup> It is a question that not only resonates throughout the book but also throughout all of Derrida's work: what if Derrida is only pretending to say something? This would certainly be a proposition that would run against that grain of thought represented by Rodolphe Gasché or Christopher Norris. That is, what if Derrida's arguments were not so much seriously philosophical but rather *pretend* transcendental arguments. For example, Gasché accuses deconstructionist critics of choosing "simply to ignore the profoundly philosophical thrust of Derrida's thought,"<sup>66</sup> although it is not entirely clear that pretending to say something is not profoundly philosophical. Christopher Norris has been trying to rescue Derrida from the 'textualists' for philosophy since at least the publication of *Derrida* (1987), in which he criticizes "zealots of a limitless textual 'freeplay' who reject the very notions of rigorous thinking or conceptual critique."<sup>67</sup> In fact, Norris openly acknowledges that he is yet another thinker who regards rhetoric as merely the handmaiden of meaning. In defending his reading of Derrida he admits that he is open to the charge that his reading may well be

a reading that vainly strives to separate the valid or substantive arguments from the passages of merely 'textualist' rhetoric, and which thus falls back into the most naive of undeconstructed philosophical assumptions. So I had better grasp the nettle and acknowledge that this is indeed where my arguments have been heading, not only in this book but in everything I have written over the past few years.<sup>68</sup>

Norris' surprisingly frank admission belies a more substantial naivety: that somehow, productive philosophical thought should or need be solemn, serious, rigorous and cogent and that any textual play or pretence to play is not only superfluous but that its non-seriousness disqualifies it from critical attention.

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65 Derrida, Jacques. *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. p. 127

66 Gasché, Rodolphe. *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. p. 3

67 Norris, Christopher. *Derrida*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. p. 27

68 Norris, *Uncritical Theory*, p. 47

But the notion of pretence as mere masking is not exhausted by Derrida's own menippean techniques. A few pages further on in *Spurs* the notion of pretence is inextricably linked with parody, or at least Derrida's own somewhat negative understanding of parody as a non-mastery:

Because [the phrase 'I have forgotten my umbrella'] is structurally liberated from any living meaning, it is always possible that it means nothing at all or that it has no decidable meaning. There is no end to its parodying play with meaning, grafted here and there, beyond any contextual body or finite code. It is quite possible that that unpublished piece, precisely because it is readable as a piece of writing, should remain forever secret. But not because it withholds some secret. Its secret is rather the possibility that indeed it might have no secret, that it might only be pretending to be simulating some hidden truth within its folds.<sup>69</sup>

This pretending to play, which Derrida suggests is one possible resolution of a hermeneutic paradox, reveals much of Derrida's own parodic menippean strategy.<sup>70</sup>

Modern understandings of parody are usually cast in the negative, as a travesty, or the bringing low of what was once, or is, high. As Margaret Rose points out, this has much to do with the confusion, from the eighteenth century on, of burlesque and travesty with parody, with a particular etymology of parody: *παροδία* as a singing against, a singing which is perceived to be in opposition to the singing of a song, inciting laughter directed against that song.<sup>71</sup> There is, however, another etymology which stresses that it is a singing beside or near — a supplementary singing. F.J. Lelièvre notes in his work on ancient parody that "para may be said to develop two trends of meaning, being used to express such ideas as nearness, consonance, and derivation as well as transgression, opposition or difference."<sup>72</sup>

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69 Derrida, *Spurs*, pp. 131-33

70 The figure of "Pretence to play" appears elsewhere in Derrida's work: in the figure of the counterfeit in *Cinders*: "but the counterfeiter can lie, he's lying, I am almost sure of it, from experience" (p.51) and also his extended writing-with of Baudelaire's "Counterfeit Money" in Derrida, Jacques, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, Trans. Peggy Kamuf, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.

71 Rose, Margaret A. *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. pp. 6-19

72 Lelièvre, F. J. "The Basis of Ancient Parody", *Greece and Rome*, Series 2, June 1954, 1/2 66–81. p. 66. Samuel Weber notes that "The German prefix, *ver-*, stems from the Gothic, where it signifies 'out,' 'before,' 'past,' and 'away from.' The Latin *per-*, *por-*, *pro-* as well as the Greek *peri-*, *par-*, *pro-* and *para-* belong to the same word family," emphasising the richness that the prefix *para-* can have in its constructions such as parody and paradox. Weber, Samuel. *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. p. 4n

The predominant tradition in which parody has been studied has relegated it to the “lower” art forms because of the presence of laughter and the difficult questions which laughter raises (or provokes) such as its fluid epistemology, its ecstatic (and indeterminable) ontology and its grotesque metaphysics (as has been discussed in relation to the *Dunciad*). As a menippean satirist, Derrida is clearly writing in a parodic tradition, but a parodic tradition which must be understood in terms unfamiliar to most modern understandings of parody. For example in *The Gift of Death* Derrida first cites Patočka referring to Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”:

Force is thus found to be the most extreme withdrawal of being which, like the letter searched for in the story by E. A. Poe, is nowhere in a more secure place than under one’s very eyes in the form of the entity, that is to say of forces that mutually organize and liberate themselves, man being no exception, deprived as he is of all things, of all mystery.

This vision of being reduced by the entity has been presented in the work of a great contemporary thinker without credence having been given or attention paid to it. (125)

then proceeds with his “own” continuation of the passage:

Heidegger *himself*, and his work, come to resemble a purloined letter. He is not only an interpreter of the play of dissimulation who can be likened to one who exposes letters; he or it is also in the place of what is called here being or the letter [*l’être ou lettre*]. This is not the first time that Heidegger and Poe are found under the same cover, folded together, for better or for worse, posthumously, in the same (hi)story of letters. Patočka does it again, warning us of this sleight of hand while also keeping Heidegger’s name under wraps, performing one trick to hide another.<sup>73</sup>

Here is the parody of nearness and derivation.<sup>74</sup> But it is also a parody which is a play of dissimulation, one trick which is performed to hide another. Much of Derrida’s writing can be described as a writing-with or a writing-in-conjunction that is

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73 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 39

74 Ulmer, Gregory L. “Of a Parodic Tone Recently Adopted in Criticism”. *New Literary History*, Spring 1982), 13:3 543-60 describes Derrida’s overall tone as parodic. However, as with most critics and theorists engaged in contemporary debate, the ‘parodic’ is characterised in largely negative terms. There is not the awareness, as Rose suggests, that parody may be defined as “the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material” (p.52). Nor is there an awareness of the positive, festive aspect in either Rose or Ulmer of the parody as an incorporative text, the parasite grown healthy and large, preserving and renewing in its very nature. But these are merely suggested as alternatives to the drab negativity with which parody is viewed in contemporary debate. Derrida’s own views on parody are unusual insofar as they do not wholly conform to this negativity.

essentially enthymemic in character. An example of this is the frequent Derridean technique of quoting large sections of another text, such as Rousseau's *Confessions* in *Of Grammatology* or Freud's "Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad" in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" or the more recent engagement with Patočka in *The Gift of Death*. The singing alongside that is involved in this parodic technique often slides into a ventriloquial performance where it is difficult to determine which voice is which. The point is not so much that 'a voice' need be unequivocally identified — rather, the parodic technique which Derrida employs is typical of menippean intertextuality and brings into play a multiplicity of voices with the effect of realising what in an interview he has referred to as "the adolescent dream of keeping a trace of all the voices which were traversing me — or were almost doing so — and which was to be so precious, unique, both specular and speculative."<sup>75</sup> In order to write adequately of Derrida's styles it is perhaps necessary to emulate, if not parody those styles for the sake of resisting paraphrase and returning to the "quote".

This writing-with or singing-beside can also be considered as a teasing-out, another kind of textual 'play'. The sense of spacing implied in a singing-beside or a textual 'nearness' also invokes the notion 'pretending', particularly in the sense of the Latin *praetendere* from which it derives, meaning to stretch forth, put forward or pretend. That is, parody as a textual nearness or besideness involves a stretching forth, or *pretending* between the two textual sites.<sup>76</sup> In its besideness or nearness, the parody is also supplementary to the ode — it is a plenitude in itself that is added to the parodied work and it is a completion of that work (as the satyr play supplemented the tragedy or as the *παροιδῶν*, who would arrive after the itinerant bards in Ancient Greece and sing their parodic songs after the epics had been recited, supplemented the epic).

If there is not already a supplementarity implied here, then between the two or more textual sites that constitute the economy of parody circulates another analogical relation of the site as *sîtos*, or food. The work of parody in this sense is analogous to the work of the 'parasitic' critic, although it might be added that the most criticism can ever aspire to is the work of parody. There is also implicit in the idea of parasitism a supplementarity such that

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75 Interview with Derek Attridge, "This Strange Institution Called Literature" in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 35. Significantly, Garry Sherbert has commented on Samuel Weber's analysis of the 'uncanny' similarities between wit and theoretical speculation in *The Legend of Freud*. Sherbert, *Menippean Satire and the Poetics of Wit*, p. 82

76 This textile analogy is supported in "Plato's Pharmacy" in Derrida's *Dissemination*.

In letting itself be parasitized, the system of language as a system of the idiom has perhaps parasitized the system of painting; more precisely, it will have shown up, by analogy, the essential parasitizing which opens every system to its outside and divides the unity of the line [*trait*] which purports to mark its edges.<sup>77</sup>

That is, the supplementarity of parasitism exposes and “shows up” in much the same way as the menippea is supplementary to literature and to the ideas it is supposed to satirise. As the parasite is supplementary to the feast, so too is the work of parasitizing and parody supplementary to the text. To complete the symposiastic analogy, the parasitic critic is the uninvited guest who is superfluous to the feast yet, by his presence, completes the feast.<sup>78</sup>

And so with the habitual denigration of the critic as parasite we can discover the symposiastic (*necessarily* symposiastic) relation of critic to work, of parody to work parodied.<sup>79</sup> And it is precisely the thread of the text, that which is teased out, that

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77 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 7

78 Derrida seems aware of this analogical connection in the beginning of his “Parergon” in which he writes, “Opening with the *satis*, the *enough* (inside and outside, above and below, to left and right), satire, farce on the edge of excess.” Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 17

79 In *Will to Power* Nietzsche writes “For many, abstract thinking is toil; for me, on good days, it is feast and frenzy” (XIV, 24); Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1968. Heidegger’s response to this may be considered to be of a genre with the response of theorists such as Gasché and Norris who regard Derrida as a transcendental philosopher (as opposed to the “textualist” approach, the narrow “literary” approach and, no doubt, the irrelevant “Menippean approach”). I reproduce Heidegger’s response from *Nietzsche Vol.1*:

Abstract thinking a feast ? The highest form of human existence ? Indeed. But at the same time we must observe how Nietzsche views the essence of the feast, in such a way that he can think of it only on the basis of his fundamental conception of all being, will to power. “The feast implies: pride, exuberance, frivolity; mockery of all earnestness and respectability; a divine affirmation of oneself, out of animal plenitude and perfection — all obvious states to which the Christian may not honestly say Yes. The feast is paganism par excellence” (WM, 916) For that reason, we might add, there is no Christian philosophy. There is no true philosophy that could be determined anywhere else than from within itself. For the same reason there is no pagan philosophy, inasmuch as anything ‘pagan’ is always something Christian — the counter-Christian. The Greek poets and thinkers can hardly be designated as ‘pagan.’

Feasts require long and painstaking preparation. This semester we want to prepare ourselves for the feast, even if we do not make it as far as the celebration, even if we only catch a glimpse of the preliminary festivities at the feast of thinking — experiencing what meditative thought is and what it means to be at home in genuine questioning.

Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol.1*, pp. 5-6

which has play between the two sites, that feeds the process: parody *as* criticism, criticism as pretending, parody of criticism as pretending to play.

But how do we read this ‘pretending to play’? By far the most difficult aspect of attempting to discuss menippean satire is the adequation between the means used to discuss and the subject of discussion. Is ‘pretending to play’ mere dissimulation, a feigning of play that is at heart a mask for seriousness (or a serious mask<sup>80</sup>); or is it that in pretending to play one is admitting to an essential seriousness, that one can only play at a remove, that play as such can never be fully present; or is it a play of play, a feigning that plays at playing, a ‘teasing out’ or a ‘stretching forth’ of play — a playful distancing or spacing from the presence of play; or is it that in pretending to play one is not playing at all, that the playing at playing does not involve play at all, that play is circumvented in a gesture full of solemnity, that the appearance of play is mere appearance with no substance at all; or is it that the playing at play is the supplement of play, play as its own supplement; or is it that making believe is all that is at stake, a becoming-to-belief? And so on.

“Pretending to play” escapes redundancy only by the discreteness of play. For if we can rely upon play as somehow essentially being against the serious, that play is the absence of the serious and vice-versa, only then can we distinguish the proliferation of frivolity in the pseudo-paradox above. But to do so is already to condemn the comic to an exclusion from the serious, to define generic bounds by the very fact of their interpenetration and, hence, indivisibility (just as the exclusion of the serious from the comic, as with the apparent expulsion of seriousness from the serio-comic or the carnivalesque, is merely another genre to which the ascription of genericity is the solemn, Adamic act). Since we find that the serious and the comic are words which belie their present meaning and which can be traced in an economy of generic exchange where what is circulated is the endless overturning of one by the other, then the term “serio-comic” is yet another instance of this redundancy.

When we consider menippean satire as the genre to which much of Derrida’s writings belong we should resist the equation of the menippea with the serio-comic (for we have already left the “comic” behind for the academy to feast on) and instead consider

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80 Derrida has written that “for Saussure [writing] is even a garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise, a festival mask that must be exorcised, that is to say warded off, by the good word: ‘Writing veils the appearance of language; it is not a guise but a disguise.’ (p.51) [p.30]” Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 35

this genre as a “pretending to play”. In order to examine this further, it will be necessary to consider how parody may be understood analogously to “pretending to play”, and how, despite the abandonment of the carcass of the comic to its feasting parasites, this parasitic aspect of the critic is part of the teasing complex of parody: parasite, pretence as “stretching forth”, *poesis* as “drawing forth”, the teasing as a shredding and a worrying, a “teasing out” of a thread, the unravelling of the textile, the text.

Derrida draws attention to his own, grotesque mode of arguing in *The Gift of Death* when he repeatedly asks “Are we just playing here?” The second time he asks this question he continues:

If this were a game, then it would need to be kept safe and untouched, like the game that must be kept alive between humans and God. For the game between these two unique “every others,” like the same “every other,” opens the space and introduces the hope of salvation, the economy of “saving oneself” that we shall shortly discuss.<sup>81</sup>

This has much to do with the question of style: that a grotesque style, the grotesque logic that characterises Derrida’s work, offers the possibility of discovery with the grotesque operating as a mode that can yield liberating possibilities.<sup>82</sup>

Derrida invokes the grotesque again to approach the difficult question of the *mysterium tremendum* earlier discussed in the work: “This play of words seems to contain the very possibility of a secret that hides and reveals itself at the same time within a single sentence and, more than that, within a single language.”<sup>83</sup> Later Derrida describes the affinities of the secret with the realm of the grotesque: the margin, the shadows, the underground.

That which is hidden, as that which remains inaccessible to the eye or hand, is not necessarily encrypted in the derivative senses of that word — ciphered, coded, to be interpreted — in contrast to being hidden in the shadows (which is what it also meant in Greek).

What should we make of the slight difference that appears in the Gospel between the Greek and the Latin of the Vulgate? In *in abscondito*,

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81 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 87

82 It is significant that many of the art works Derrida uses to illustrate his discussion of parergonality in *The Truth in Painting* are grotesques: the cryptoporticos of Fantuzzi and Master L.D. and grotesque ornamental panels of Fantuzzi, among others.

83 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 89

*absconditus* refers rather to the hidden, the secret, the mysterious as that which retreats into the invisible, that which is lost from sight.<sup>84</sup>

The grotesque, then, in Derrida is an important principle which offers the means of discovery.

But the supplementarity of the grotesque (the embellished border, the ornamental panel, the column composed of human figures) also contains within it the definitional logic of the menippea as ‘pretending to play.’ In his introduction to *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, Leavey compares Derrida’s textual ‘smearing’ with that of Cy Twombly’s painting:

His smearing traps without grasping, traps without catching, in the hollowness, the emptiness of its snare. The stroke of ‘pretense’ in writing confirms this. Smearing introduces the *pretended* erasure.... [b]ut smearing also introduces a *double* pretense<sup>85</sup>

which is later indicated as exemplary of the *parergon*. The notion of *parergonality*, which is developed in Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*, is another example of Derrida’s logic of the supplement, or trace. Derrida’s consideration of Kant’s use of the term *parergon* stresses its supplementarity:

The Greek here [of Kant: *parerga*] confers a quasi-conceptual dignity to the notion of this *hors-d’oeuvre* which however does not stand simply outside the work [*hors d’oeuvre*], also acting alongside, right up against the work [*ergon*].... Philosophical discourse will always have been *against* the *parergon*. But what about this *against*.

A *parergon* comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [*au bord, à bord*]. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [*Il est d’abord l’-à-bord*].<sup>86</sup>

The example of the *parergon* which seems to stand out the most, so to speak, is the phallus. The example of the *parergon* as a column which is both ornamental and functional is indicative of the framing that exposes the undecidability of both the

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84 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 89. See also Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex* for a detailed discussion of the techniques and iconography of the grotesque.

85 Leavey, “The Fractured Frame” in Derrida, *The Archaeology of the Frivolous*, p. 13

86 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 54

fiction and the frame. However the example of the parergon as column soon becomes the parergon as erection:

The body I was saying. The body of a man, as is understood and goes without saying. It is *starting from* it that the erection of the largest is preferred.<sup>87</sup>

This is linked with the figure of the sublime as a “pleasing-oneself-in” which is “purely or merely negative (*nur negativ*) to the extent that it suspends play and elevates to seriousness.”<sup>88</sup> Yet behind the “pleasing-oneself-in” lurks “that dangerous supplement” of onanistic gratuity, part of the persistent menippean theme of ‘playing with the phallus’ in Derrida’s work. For example, in *Cinders* he writes, “And you can also receive semen through the ear”<sup>89</sup> while in *Dissemination* there is the pervasive analogy between dissemination as expenditure without return and ‘spending.’ Writing of Derrida’s essay “My Chances / *Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies” Leavey notes that

He conveys his understanding of the scene of writing by means of an analogy with the annunciation as it is couched in the apocalyptic mode, in the Biblical tradition of apocalyptic prophecy and forecasts. Derrida begins his dramatic comparison by noting that ‘apocalypse’ as it is used in the Bible does not suggest the modern sense of catastrophe but rather a revelation, as in the lifting up of the hair to reveal the ear or the eye, giving access to a secret. Similarly, removing the foreskin in circumcision to reveal the glans — symbolic castration — is an apocalyptic gesture. (Derrida’s menippea takes ‘anatomy’ literally). To approach philosophy in terms of annunciation, in the manner of listening with the psychoanalytic or the dialogical ear, required a shift away from signifieds to tone.<sup>90</sup>

These phallic images are examples of a grotesque transformation which is an important, defining aspect of grotesque logic. While the bodily is not as apparent in the didascalic or philosophical menippea as it is in, say Rabelais, Sterne or Joyce, if it is repressed its return is in the form of a ludic metaphoricity which, although grotesque in its nature, is primarily aimed at creating further avenues of intellectual exploration.

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87 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 140

88 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 130

89 Derrida, Jacques. *Cinders*. Ed and Trans. Ned Lukacher. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 198. p. 73

90 Leavey, *Glossary*, p.199b-c

The supplementarity which is one of the central features of Derrida's menippean satires appears in many forms, leading Lukacher to state that "he has also written that cinder is only one name among others for 'these remains without remainder': 'Trace or cinder. These names are as good as any other.'"<sup>91</sup> *Cinders* is, like *Glas*, one of the more obviously menippean texts of Derrida. The elaborate punning which constitutes the work, and is a prevalent feature of Derrida's writing in general, is an example of a kind of grotesque association. Consider the following example, in which the ubiquity of the supplement, or in this instance the cinder, is underlined by the punning transformation of 'decentring' into yet another cinder:

And from a mere letter indebted to a dental d/t flung from the tongue  
(‘Though the letter gains strength solely from this indirection’), a centre  
crumbles and melts, it is dispersed in a throw of the die: cinder.

[... *un centre s'effrite et s'attendrit, il se disperse d'un coup de dé:  
cendre*]<sup>92</sup>

Argumentation by punning, as with the above example where the grotesque theme of the importance of the aleatory is introduced through wordplay, is an example of argumentation from notation. According to Milton's "Art of Logic", notation (*notatio*) is the interpretation of a name and is a derived and nominal argument: "as Cicero says, one elicited from the force of a name."<sup>93</sup> While Milton admits that notation is a mode of argumentation, he considers that the corruption of language by wrong pronunciation, "the lower classes" and "incorrect writing" means that "an argument from notation, unless the latter happens to be very obvious, is quite fallacious and often ludicrous."<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, he allows that "just as notation argues a name, so in turn a name argues a notation."<sup>95</sup> Part of Derrida's menippean repertoire is a pervasive notational style, an inversion of its supposed limitations in order to discover the new.

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91 Lukacher, "Introduction: Mourning Becomes Telepathy" in Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 1

92 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 69

93 Milton, "Art of Logic" in Milton, John, *Complete Prose Works Volume VIII 1666–1682*. Ed Maurice Kelley, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 294

94 Milton, "Art of Logic" in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton Volume VIII 1666-1682*, p. 294

95 Milton, "Art of Logic" in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton Volume VIII 1666-1682*, pp. 295-96

For example: “Boats are never far away when one is handling figures of rhetoric. Brothel [*bordeI*] has the same etymology; it’s an easy one...”<sup>96</sup>

The significance of identifying a major thinker such as Derrida as a menippean satirist has enormous implications for reevaluating the position of menippean satire not just within that “institution called literature” but also as a genre which occupies a unique role with regard to exposing the supplementarity of language. Supplementarity, as discussed earlier in relation to Urquhart’s *The Jewel*, is that which completes as much as it is something in excess to that to which it is added. The supplementarity of the menippea can be exploited as an adequation of the concept of the trace-structure, and this is what Derrida is doing when he “quotes” menippean satire. In referring to his book of the same name, Derrida writes “dissemination thus expresses in five words [*il y a là cendre*] what is destined, by the fire, to dispersion without return, the pyrification of what does not remain and returns to no one.”<sup>97</sup> — another aspect of supplementarity, particularly if one takes his later statement, that the cinder “means the difference between what remains and what is,” as if the difference between what remains and what is is the supplement of ashes, neither here nor there.

This neither here-nor-thereness of the supplement describes the supplementarity of language: “these gray dusty words”<sup>98</sup> and “would we be moulding the urn of a language for this cinder sentence...”<sup>99</sup> or “the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately you blow into the dust of words which are the cinder itself.”<sup>100</sup> Appropriately, *Cinders* ends on an inconclusive, teasing note: “I just did and I am just about to tell you —”<sup>101</sup> This is a tease in a wider sense than dissimulation: a drawing out, a play in the full sense of its possibility.

When asked by Derek Attridge about the absence of Beckett from his oeuvre, Derrida responded, “This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; but also too close. Precisely because of this proximity, it is too hard for me, too easy and too hard... [because he writes] texts which are both too

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96 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 54.

97 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 39

98 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 41

99 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 53

100 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 53

101 Derrida, *Cinders*, p. 77

close to me and too distant for me even to be able to respond to them.”<sup>102</sup> It is this somewhat startling omission (and admission) from Derrida that exposes a crucial aspect of the Derridean project. If Derrida were to attempt an extended ‘writing-with’ of Beckett, the inability to gain the necessary purchase of a spacing in order to parodically sing alongside suggests a coincidence of purpose, style and form. Not only are both writers menippean satirists, they are both outsiders to the ‘French’ in which they write (Beckett the Irishman, Derrida the Algerian Jew) which suggests that they derive from a similar marginality. For Derrida to begin to write of Beckett would involve, perhaps, an impossible spacing from himself, or at least would expose his strategy more nakedly than may be comfortable. Consider this final passage:

When I found myself, with students, reading some... texts, I would give up because it would not have been possible, or honest, or even interesting, to extract a few “significant” lines from a... text. The composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even the ones that seem the most “decomposed,” that’s what “remains” finally the most “interesting,” that’s the work, that’s the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematics is exhausted (and also exhausted, by others, for a long time now, in other modes).<sup>103</sup>

While this is, surprisingly, Derrida’s description of his engagement with Beckett, it could very well serve for mine or someone else’s engagement with Derrida himself. A similar coincidence of style and purpose has been indicated by Derrida to exist with Swift. When asked in the interview “*Ja, or the faux-bond*” of the reading effects of the device at work in *Glas*, Derrida responds by reading a large section from Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels*, “Voyage to the Land of the Houyhnhnms” as, he states, “I feel this is going to imprint, over-imprint itself on everything I might improvise.”<sup>104</sup> In short, Derrida’s work demands to be read within the tradition of menippean satire.

The enthymemic nature of the grotesque logic at work in Derrida’s writing resists paraphrase and quotation — instead it requires a performative adequation of its grotesqueness, which would involve a revealing dissimulation of the fact that his ‘originality’ is itself a dissimulating posture, inventive, liberating, and all the more interesting once its menippean genealogy has been established.

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102 Derrida, “This Strange Institution Called Literature” in *Acts of Literature*, p. 60

103 Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, p. 61

104 Derrida, Jacques. *Points... Interviews 1974–1994*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf et. al. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. p. 31

# 8

## Conclusion

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A genre such as menippean satire resists closure and systematisation yet, paradoxically, these concluding remarks to this thesis may appear to be doing just that. It is appropriate, however, that a grotesque mode of literature such as menippean satire acts as a site of discovery.

In attempting to give an outline of the genre of menippean satire since the renaissance, this thesis has developed a vocabulary appropriate to considering menippean satire in a relatively non-hierarchical context: grotesque transformation, grotesque association, grotesque metaphysics, grotesque mimesis, enthymemic irony and grotesque logic are terms which emphasise the liberating possibilities of the grotesque in the comic tradition.

One of the more pertinent points made in this thesis is the prevalence of menippean satire in contemporary literature, both theoretical and fiction. This points to the role of menippean satire in general: as a genre of puncture, it attacks the boundaries between categories of thought: literature and other forms of writing such as philosophy; the body and language; and, perhaps, differences in gender.

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